

EDWARD DALTON,

THE

WANDERING EXECUTOR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CLARENDON.



CHAPTER I.

WE left the villain Rudd, to all appearance, dead in the thieves' den at Dover, from which Herbert, as we have seen, so providentially escaped. Alarmed by the uproar, the old bloated landlady had hurried upstairs, accompanied by a trusty emissary, with a huge patch over one eye, and a broken nose, whom she designated by the name of Black Dick; and who no sooner saw the prostrate, and, apparently, lifeless form of Rudd, than he immediately raised it into a sitting posture, and then, with more rapidity than gentleness, untied his neckerchief, tore open his coat, and threw a quantity of cold water upon his face. This treatment saved the rascal's life; and in a short

time, Rudd opened his eyes and gasped for breath.

“What cheer, messmate? you were as near as maybe slipping stays, and setting off on a voyage for Deadman’s Sound,” growled Black Dick, with a gruff laugh. “Mother Punshon, if the poor sinner had a drop o’ gin, he might stand a better chance.”

“Ay! and who’s to pay me for that?” muttered the old hag, surlily, as she glanced disdainfully at the miserable attire Rudd wore.

“I can,” whispered Rudd, haughtily.

“Oh, then I’ve no objection at all,” rejoined the hostess, more graciously, as she strode towards the door. “I will send it in a moment.”

“Send two,” said Rudd, in a louder voice; “I owe this good fellow one.”

“And mind they be full glasses, mother,” cried Black Dick, as a parting hint. “Can you stand, my hearty?”

“I’ll try, at any rate,” said Rudd, staggering to his feet. “Where is the other man and the boy?”

“ Far enough off by this, I’ll warrant,” rejoined his companion, significantly. “ Why, didn’t he attempt to throttle you ? ”

“ Hell’s curses on him! he did,” growled Rudd, fiercely. “ He caught me at an advantage, or he never could have done it; but I’ll pay him off tenfold, yet. But the boy! the boy! oh, I wouldn’t have lost him to have found a fortune.”

“ Your son, maybe? ”

“ No matter what he was,” retorted the other, scowling; “ and at such a time, too! ”

He threw himself at full length down upon the bed, and lay in moody silence until the liquor arrived, carried by a dirty slipshod girl, who leered on Black Dick most impudently as she gave him his share.

“ Mistress said it would be paid for,” she said, eyeing Rudd with a cold, keen eye.

Rudd threw her a shilling. “ Pay her, and keep the change,” he said; and, drinking the burning liquid off at a draught, he raised himself up and began to think again.

The other man, in the meanwhile, was eying

him with furtive interest from beneath his shaggy brows. He was of a very swarth complexion, and had shaggy black hair and bushy whiskers, which met under his throat, and, added to a pair of piercing black eyes, and something lawless and daring in his manner, gave him a very formidable and cut-throat appearance.

“ You’ve been on the road, neighbour, if I’m not very much mistaken,” said he; after a long pause.

Rudd started, and eyed him keenly for a full minute or more before he replied.

“ What makes you think that?” he inquired, at last, with a laugh.

“ Oh, one can tell that at a glance. The Freeman’ never carry themselves like other people. Your poor tramp, for instance, is a very different fellow from a jolly pad or a jarvie.”

“ And so you think I am not a tramp, eh?” continued Rudd, surveying him with renewed interest.

“ I’m certain on’t, for I’ve been one myself; I

know the tricks of the trade. D'ye want a helping hand?"

"Perhaps I do. Which road have you travelled, friend?"

"Oh, I generally took the north circuit, from York to Newcastle; but I got into trouble at the latter place a year or so ago, and hav'n't ventured into my old haunts since. I know this beat very well; and if you choose to let each go halves—"

"Could you get a disguise if I found the money for it?"

"Easily: I know a shop where they sell all those kind of things, and could pick you up almost any thing you wanted."

"I would like a countryman's dress, for it would excite least attention down in the part we are going to. But we'll talk more about the matter in the morning. What's your name, friend?"

"Dick Bayles is my real name; but I get Black Dick generally, I'm so very black," and he laughed. "That's an ugly scar you've got on your cheek."

Rudd winced, and said, in a tone of concentrated rage, "Yes, I got that in a hand-to-hand fight

with a foster-brother of mine, called Dalton. I was as pretty a man of my inches as you could see before that——”

“ But you paid him off for it, didn't you ? ” demanded Bayles, eagerly.

“ I will do so one of these days, I hope,” rejoined the other, savagely : “ yes, I promise him, when next we meet, that I shall have a reckoning for that and a few more injuries besides.”

“ Do you know where he is now ? ” inquired Bayles, as he leisurely undressed himself, whilst Rudd sat on his bed, apparently determined to save himself the trouble of such an act.

“ In Paris.”

“ Bosh ! that's a long way off, pal.”

“ It is : I was going there with the boy, but now it's useless.”

“ Then why not search for the lad : he can't have run far already, one would think.”

Rudd foamed at the mouth with baffled rage. “ It is too late now,” he said, in a tone of despair.

“ Had you been long in company with the rascal ? ”

“ Only two or three days. From the first I mistrusted him, he was such a white-livered rascal, and showed such a sneaking kindness for the whelp. As long as I kept possession of the brat, I punished twenty people that I hated with all my heart. There was Dalton, and his brother, a man that was left guardian to him, and—but no matter! he has escaped from my clutches; but woe be to him if he ever falls into them again!”

He then drew the bed-clothes about him, and presently pretended to be fast asleep. His companion was some time in undressing, and even after he had extinguished the candle, sat for half-an-hour or more on the stock of his bed, revolving in his mind all that his new associate had told him. At length, he aroused himself, and crept stealthily into bed, and was soon asleep.

Rudd moaned and muttered repeatedly during his slumber, which was evidently disturbed by some painful dreams. His companion, however, did not awake, for he was a very heavy sleeper, and when once fairly unconcious, it required no

slight disturbance to arouse him. Towards morning Rudd awoke, with the perspiration streaming from every pore, although the night was chilly. His dreams had appalled even his stout heart, and for several minutes he vainly strove to remember where he was. At length, recollection returned. He sat up in bed, and listened to the calm, regular breathing of his companion.

“ He must only be a new hand, or he could not sleep so soundly as that,” he thought, as his mind recurred to his own fearful visions, from which he was just aroused ; and then he threw himself back again upon the bed, and, closing his eyes, attempted to sleep again.

When his new confederate awoke, he was up and dressed.

“ Hallo there ! you make an early start, my good fellow,” was Bayles’s good-humoured salutation, as he began to dress himself. “ How long have you been up ? ”

“ Not long,” rejoined the other, sullenly ; “ I didn’t rest well, and so got up, and put on my clothes : as soon as we have had some breakfast,

we will go to this shop you were speaking about, and choose a disguise."

"Ay, for you, if you like : I fancy I'm not well enough known down in the parts we're going to, to need one."

"All the better, if you are not ; I wish I could say as much ; however, if we only get something that will suit at the shop, I defy the devil himself to recognise me. You're a slow dresser, Bayles."

"Why, yes, I am rather : it's a bit of my nature, I think," said the other, laughing.

Rudd did not reply, but began to pace the room with hasty strides, for he was beginning to get impatient ; fortunately for Mr. Bayles, the latter soon completed his toilet, and then led the way down stairs to a little dark den, in which breakfast was already prepared for two.

Coarse bread, broiled red herrings, and tea, were the staple of the meal. The close, confined dingy hole, for you could not call it a room, reeked with the mingled smell of stale tobacco and the coarse rankness of the fish : the two men ate like famished wolves, and were waited upon by the

sluttish Hebe who had brought them the liquor on the previous night.

"There was a man drowned last night, Bayles, on the Hard," she said, in a cold, callous tone, as she brought in a reinforcement of the herrings. "They're going to sit upon him in an hour or so."

"A man! what kind of a man, Jess?" inquired Bayles, carelessly, as he swallowed his tea.

"Oh, how should I know! they were carrying the corpse up stairs, abit ago; it quite gave me a turn."

"You're such a feeling hussey, Jess," rejoined the man, with a sneering laugh. "There hasn't been any foul play, has there?"

"I know nothing but what I've told you," retorted the woman, with a toss of her slovenly head. "They've laid it on the table up stairs in the billiard room till the jury comes, and you can go and look for yourself if you are curious."

"Pshaw! I hate dead bodies," growled Bayles, with a look of ineffable disgust.

"I should like to see it," interposed Rudd, for

the first time looking up; "I like to see dead bodies."

Bayles involuntarily retreated from him as he said this.

"I like to see how men have died," continued Rudd, speaking in a quick, excited voice. "One man goes out of the world as calmly as if he would waken again to-morrow morning, instead of having to lie and fester in some noisome grave; another takes his last look of life like the sun in a tempest, with every feature distorted by a thousand horrible passions."

"Suppose we go up and see this body—that is, you may; as I will stay outside, until you have seen all you wish—Come!"

"With all my heart!" rejoined Rudd, carelessly; "let us pay the reckoning first, and then we needn't return!" and he rang the bell.

The bill was not a heavy one, and Rudd immediately discharged it; the woman looked hard at the sovereign he gave her, but its ring was true and sound; and she changed it without hesitation.

“ You aren’t a smasher, I hope ? ” she said, eyeing him suspiciously.

“ No, no, mother ! ” retorted the man, with a smile. “ Come, let’s have a kiss, for luck ! ”

“ Get away with you, you impudent dog ! — you ought to be ashamed to put on a poor lone woman in such a way ! ” was her response.

Rudd got the kiss, and gave her a hug into the bargain, that might have squeezed the breath out of a bear, and then followed Bayles into the passage. As they gained the first landing on the staircase, the latter drew up, and in a whisper demanded—

“ What, in the name of all that’s fortunate, induced you to kiss old, drunken, mother Punshon, in that way ? surely, your taste doesn’t run on such cattle as that ? ”

“ Why, you see, she asked me a very difficult question ; and the only way to get out of the scrape was, to flatter her vanity a bit,” rejoined Rudd, with a laugh. “ I saw she rather fancied me last night, and so the thought saved me.”

“ Why, wasn’t the sovereign good ? ” inquired Bayles, preparing to ascend again.

“ May be, and may be not,” rejoined Rudd, carelessly ; “ how should a man know all that passes through his hands ? the money’s hard enough to get, to make it too keenly scrutinised when it does come.”

“ Now, this is the room ! ” interposed Bayles, throwing open the door of a long, low room, which opened out upon the sea. “ You won’t be long, I fancy ? ” and so saying, he sate down upon a bench in the passage, and began to whistle a quick step.

Rudd cast a hurried glance round the room as he advanced into it, and his eye took in, in a moment, the dirty walls and dingy ceiling, the naked benches and billiard-tables, on which the cues were still lying. A torn number of “ Bell’s Life ” lay on the floor, near a spittoon, around which a quantity of broken tobacco-pipes were thrown ; a shattered chair or two lay in another corner, as if some drunken squabble had taken place there the night

before, contrasting still more strongly with the presence of the corpse.

On a table, in the centre of the room, lay something covered with a dingy yellow sheet. Rudd felt his flesh creep, in spite of all his hardihood, as he found himself so abruptly placed in the companionship of death; but, with a heavy step, he approached, and drew aside the sheet.

He involuntarily started, and drew back. Rigid, and pale, and fixed as those features were, he recognised them only too readily. By some strange accident, they had brought the body of poor Hemp to the very house from which he had fled the previous night, and the man he had attempted to murder now stood over his own senseless corpse; a tide of revengeful feelings swept over the lawless heart of his antagonist, as he once more drew the sheet over the lifeless form, still reeking from its fatal plunge; and, with a fixed and impenetrable look, he turned from the room, and rejoined his companion.

“Some poor fellow, that has been sick of the world,” he said, carelessly, as he strode down

stairs; "he makes a pretty corpse enough, too, poor wretch!"

"Did you ever see him before?" demanded Bayles, perfectly unconscious of the connexion there had been between the two men. "It wasn't the villain that attempted to throttle you, last night, was it?"

Rudd darted a keen, inquisitive look at his new ally, for a moment, as if he felt that the latter had suspected who the dead man really was; but Bayles looked so unconscious, that he felt reassured; and only answered coldly,—

"I never saw the man before, to my knowledge."

They were already at the door. Bayles looked up and down the street for a moment, in a peculiar manner; then darted rapidly across, closely followed by Rudd, who was as fleet of foot, and almost as stealthy, as a greyhound. Bayles then plunged into the first narrow alley they came to, and ran rapidly forward, with his head ducked down, until they had placed mother Punshon's a good quarter of a mile behind them, and then

relaxing his pace, suffered Rudd to overtake him.

“ Walk quietly, now, for a bit, and we will soon be there,” he said, in a low tone, and he fell into a lounging walk, which Rudd imitated to the letter.

After threading innumerable lanes, each a dirty fac-simile of its predecessor, they stopped, at last, at a house, from the broken and dilapidated windows of which dangled various articles of wearing attire.

“ What disguise do you mean to assume ? ” inquired Bayles, pausing on the threshold.

“ Oh, a sailor will suit me famously,” rejoined his companion, with a gruff laugh ; “ only lead on, and let us get out of this place as quick as we can.”

Bayles complied, and presently ushered him into a very spacious but very low apartment, dimly lit with two narrow windows, through the half-glazed casements of which the light fought its way ; a few disreputable looking people, thieves that had plundered sick men’s deathbeds, or had

pilfered from hedge-rows and out-houses the property of the honest and the unwary, were chaffering over a pile of dirty clothes, with the owner and his people, who drove quite as hard a bargain as the best of them.

“ We want some kind of an outfit, master,” said Bayles, who had kept in the background until the proprietor of the establishment was at liberty.

“ In what style, my man?” demanded the latter, eyeing the two men from head to foot as he stood opposite to them. “ We have all sorts; honest mechanics, struggling tradesmen, tailors, sailors, ruined peasants, jockies; the tradesman or the peasant is the most popular, and brings—of course the best price,” he added, with a coarse laugh.

“ I am afraid neither of us would suit the character,” rejoined Bayles, echoing his laugh.

“ Why, no, you both look too much like kempen coves for that, my bullies,” was the response—“ this gentleman,” tapping Rudd upon the shoulder, “ would make a famous shipwrecked sailor; have you anything of a voice, my hearty?”

In reply, Rudd chaunted a stavo of "The Bay of Biscay," that made the very walls ring again.

"That will do famously; why, you'll make your fortune in a twinkling," cried the delighted clothesman. "You must go on as a sailor and try your luck: do you know any songs of that sort?"

"Oh, plenty," responded Rudd, winking at Bayles to keep quiet; "I was reckoned a capital singer in my youth, and learnt all those songs whenever I heard them; have you a sailor's rig-out that would fit me?"

"Why, you are *raither* out of the common size," replied the shopkeeper, eycing Rudd's herculean proportions with a critical eye, "but we will see what we can do; just step this way;" and he led them through a low door into a very dark passage, which opened into another large apartment, better lighted than the former, and quite as spacious.

The spectacle it presented was really a curious one. On every side were piled huge masses—for we can call them nothing else—of half worn

clothes, formed of many bundles; each bundle contained a complete suit, down to the neckerchief and stockings, on which the price was labelled. Advancing to the farthest corner, the clothesman began to examine the different suits of which it was composed, until he came upon one which he desired Rudd to try on. The latter complied, and his companions immediately declared it to be an excellent fit, and the price being found suitable, it was immediately paid for, and the men left the shop by a different door from that by which they entered.

They then adjourned to an adjoining public-house to talk over their plans, Rudd having now quite abandoned all idea of going to Paris for the present, and here they determined to remain in ambush until the evening, when they would sally forth and get out of Dover as quickly as possible, both the men being for very urgent reasons as anxious to leave as our readers will give them credit for.

After dinner Rudd proposed that they should lie down for a few hours, and Bayles assenting,

they were shown to a room in which were a couple of dirty couches; having barricaded the door, each took one, and Rudd at any rate was soon fast asleep.

At night the landlord called them, and Rudd having paid their score, the brace of worthies sallied forth upon their adventures. The first plunge was anything but inviting, for the rain was falling in torrents, and there was a keen, biting wind that racked them to the very bones; shivering and trembling at every blast, at one moment cursing the rain, and at the next imprecating their unlucky fortunes that had driven them out at such a time, Rudd and his companion strode along the ill-lit and ill-paved streets until they were fairly clear of the town, and the country opened upon them; the change, however, was scarcely an improvement, for slushy lanes and miry fields were not one whit better than sloppy streets and dripping pent-houses: such as it was, however, they would not now turn back, but continued to trudge wearily on, until at length the storm, as if commiserating their misery, suddenly

ceased, and the moon shone out with watery brightness from behind a dense bank of clouds.

And at the same moment a confused noise, quickly followed by a piercing cry, burst upon their ears, which instantly brought them both to a halt. The next moment the cry was repeated if possible in a still shriller tone, evidently from some one beyond them upon the road; and, scarcely knowing what they were doing, the two men clapped their hats tightly on their heads, and rushed forward at the top of their speed.

CHAPTER II.

THE first to reach the spot was Rudd, who perceived in the moonlight a travelling carriage lying overturned in the middle of the road, with the horses plunging violently and entangled in the traces. A groan from the road side showed sufficiently well the condition of the unfortunate postilion, who was in fact insensible, and was lying where he had been thrown when the accident happened.

Rudd, with the assistance of Bayles, who now came up, cut the traces and released the struggling cattle, and then, not without great difficulty, dragged an old lady, whose groans and lamentations were really heartrending, out of the window, and placed her on the roadside.

“ She’s badly hurt, poor thing, “ said Bayles,

who was not without a spark of pity in his composition. "What is to be done now, comrade?—What a groan!" he added, as the unfortunate traveller moaned afresh.

"Do! why take whatever fortune gives us," growled Rudd, in whose cruel breast avarice and plunder always conquered pity, and who was too much inured to his lawless calling to care about a few groans and screams. "D'ye think the jarvie is likely to come about again?"

"No, no, poor devil, he has got his quietus," rejoined the other, carelessly.

"If I thought he would, I'd soon settle his business," muttered the villain with a sneer. "Just you stand sentry, Bayles, over the old'un, whilst I rifle the chaise; here goes," and he strode out into the road again and approached the carriage.

An exclamation of surprise distracted Bayles's attention from the old lady, who was sitting rocking herself to and fro, moaning to herself as if in great bodily pain, and he perceived Rudd in the act of lifting some one else out of the

vehicle, and running up, he saw another female in his arms.

The moonlight was strong enough to show her features, which were lovely in the extreme, although of a marble paleness, for she had fainted; a rich mass of dark hair was thrown back from a forehead as white as alabaster; the eyes were closed, and the exquisitely chiselled mouth was rigidly set as if life had already deserted its beauteous dwelling; a brutal exclamation from Rudd, and a laugh from his associate saluted this new discovery, and the young lady being placed beside her more conscious and noisy companion, the two men began to rifle the chaise, without bestowing a thought upon its owners.

They were still thus engaged when the young lady recovered from her swoon; and raising herself feebly up, saw enough to make her close her eyes and wish herself insensible again.

“ Oh dear ! dear ! ” murmured the old lady, wringing her hands with feeble helplessness, “ I shall never survive this frightful night. Oh dear, how numb my side feels ! Eleanor, love ! ”

The young lady strove to sit up, although the very earth seemed to swim around her.

“Eleanor, child!” again cried the old lady.

With an effort that almost threw her back into her swoon again, the young lady staggered to her feet, and knelt down on the wet ground beside her companion.

“Are you much hurt—very much hurt?” she whispered with a hurried accent of terror that added to her touching beauty.

“I shall never recover it, child,” rejoined the old lady, feebly. “I have had a stroke, love, and have lost my side.”

“Oh, madam, the terror and the accident together have benumbed you,” said the other sweetly. “If we could only get to some house, and have the benefit of a fire and a bath, you would be quite yourself again in the morning.”

The old lady groaned and shook her head, for she knew too truly that such comfort was not for her.

“Those men are plundering the carriage, child,” she whispered after a pause, during which

the oaths of Rudd and the laughter of Bayles were plainly audible, as they rummaged the poor old battered vehicle.

“What can we do?” murmured the young one, with all the calmness of despair; “the poor postboy is insensible, if not dying.”

“We are only two poor women,” rejoined the other in the same calm tone. “Hush! do you hear a horse galloping? your ears, child, are younger than mine.”

“If it should be Mr. McGraw!” said the young lady, as a gleam of hope for a moment illuminated her beautiful countenance. “He has had time to be here with Williams by this.”

They listened; alas! it was but an illusion. The wind moaned drearily across the watery waste of moor around them; but no approaching clatter of horse or foot proclaimed succour to be at hand.

The young lady sighed, and taking off her mantle drew it across the shoulders of her aged companion.

“Oh, my child, how wickedly I have behaved

to you!" sobbed the old lady, forgetting the broken chaise and dying postboy, her own forlorn situation, and the lawless wretches who were plundering her effects so near at hand. "I have done very wickedly, my child, towards you; but, please God, if I survive this night I will atone, as far as possible, for all."

At this moment Rudd, having rifled the carriage, took it into his head to come and see if there was anything on the persons of its possessors. The old lady met his gaze with a bearing so lofty and commanding, that the robber was for a moment staggered; and at this juncture her companion, drawing her purse from her pocket, thrust it, not without a shudder, into his hands, whispering, as she did so,—

"There, there, take that! it is all we have; and for God's sake spare her. She is very old, and badly hurt, and the least violence would kill her. It is really all."

Rudd weighed it in his hand, and held it up in the moonlight until he caught the glitter of gold between the meshes.

“And is this really all, my pretty nightingale?” he asked, with a surly laugh, as he thrust it into his pocket. “Have you never a watch to tell the time of day, nor a bracelet?”

“No! no! we never travel with such things. I declare to you, that is all;” and her arms encircled the gaunt, proud form of her fellow traveller, as if a thing so fragile and beautiful could shield it from the stormy passions of the villain before her.

“If you stay here one moment longer,” she said, struggling with her tears, “you will probably meet your reward,” and, as she spoke, the clatter of approaching horsemen was distinctly audible.

Rudd swore an oath and leaped into the middle of the road; listened intently for a moment, until he was certain which way the aid was coming, and, calling out for Bayles to follow him, ran off as fast as he could in an opposite direction.

Within a couple of minutes three or four men, mounted on horseback galloped up.

“What is the matter!” ejaculated the first,

dismounting and approaching the chaise. "My Lady Susan?"

"Here, McGraw," cried the stern voice of his mistress from the roadside. "We have met with a sad accident, and have narrowly escaped with our lives, once, if not twice."

"An accident, does your ladyship say!" exclaimed Mr. Duncan McGraw, in his old familiar tones. "And the postboy, and Miss Eleanor!"

"Miss Clarendon, thank God, beyond the fright, is not hurt, although, like myself, she has been robbed," said Lady Susan Clarendon, sternly. "Send Williams forward to get a litter somewhere, and find us shelter for the night."

"A litter, my leddy, and for what?"

"For me, fool!" retorted Lady Susan, with all her usual irritability of manner. "Do you think an old woman like me can be overturned and not feel the effects of it? Williams, ride forward and do what I told you. And you, McGraw, bring the cushions out of the carriage for Miss Clarendon

and myself to sit upon ; and some shawls as well, if the rascals have left us any."

The footman did as he was bid ; and Mr. McGraw, having procured the cushions, seated Lady Susan on one, and then placed the other for his young lady ; he then, with the assistance of the remaining man, who was a chance acquaintance picked up upon the road, contrived to place the chaise in its right position again, and then bethought himself of the postboy, whose right leg was found to be broken, in addition to other injuries on different parts of his body.

" This is a very bad business," muttered the Scotch steward, dolorously, as he stood eyeing the battered chaise, while his companion busied himself with endeavouring to put the horses to it again. " It was an ill day when we left Leven, and this to be at the bottom of it a'."

An evil day, indeed, it was. How could it be otherwise when such men as Jasper Vernon were the ruling spirits of the unfortunate and self-willed Lady Susan, and such men as Mr. Duncan McGraw were the agents by whom her movements

were regulated? She had remained in Scotland as long as ever her terrors would permit her, and was now on her way to seek out Jasper Vernon, and to aid in the discovery of poor little Herbert.

On such a mission Eleanor could scarcely be left behind, and so the pair set off in company, Lady Susan's proud spirit torturing her with the upbraidings of a conscience impressed with the terrible injuries she had inflicted upon the family of her kinsman, and determined to break for ever with her false ally, and to repair, as far as in her lay, the evils she had committed towards Eleanor and her brothers.

Nothing had occurred of an untoward nature until an hour or so before we have thus once more fallen in with them, when, from some cause or other, her ladyship's two attendants were detained upon the road, and the carriage with its two occupants travelled slowly forward to give them time to rejoin it; added to this, the postilion had had a glass or two too much, and the horses were fresh and very unmanageable, so that before very long they fairly ran away with the

chaise at a terrific pace, and coming to an abrupt turn of the road the whole were overturned, the driver nearly killed, and Lady Susan, as she termed it, received a stroke which would probably shorten her days. Eleanor alone, fortunately, escaped unhurt, and when she had recovered from the fright, was the same quiet, sensible, unselfish being we have always seen her.

Within half an hour Williams returned with the joyful intelligence that there was a very good inn within half a mile, and that a litter would be despatched from it for Lady Susan at once. There was nothing further to be done, therefore, but to wait as patiently as they could where they were, until this arrived.

Eleanor sat down by the side of her ladyship, whose pale, stern face was distinctly visible by the light of one of the carriage lamps, which the footman had lighted and placed on the road in front of them : at times a convulsive frown would pass across it, betokening, in spite of all her efforts, how keenly she suffered ; but more than this, no groan nor complaint escaped her. Lady

Susan could be a martyr, at any rate, if she fell short of being a saint.

It seemed hours to Eleanor's impatient imagination before the litter arrived; and when it did arrive, the attendants were so unskilful that one or two smothered groans escaped her ladyship, in spite of all her stoicism. Eleanor was her guardian angel through all; and with Eleanor's hand clasped in her very icy grasp, the old lady travelled slowly and gently to the inn.

A night of suffering succeeded, which Lady Susan bore with heroic fortitude, and which left Eleanor almost as weak and feeble as the real sufferer herself.

"Go to bed, love! go to bed; for you are scarcely able to stand," murmured Lady Susan, with new found gentleness, as Eleanor withdrew the curtains, and the grey dawn stole into the room; "Janet can stay with me for a few hours, love."

"But you are still, madam, so very, very ill," whispered Eleanor, stooping, and kissing the feverish forehead. "If you will only permit me

to stay a little longer, and desire Janet to lie down instead."

Hereupon rose a perfect torrent of refusals from Mrs. Janet, who might have nursed a whole hospital of invalids for a twelvemonth without exhibiting any symptoms of fatigue. "She was so used to her ladyship's vagaries, and she wudna lie down, not she! and Miss Clarendon, puir thing, was sae delicate, she couldna stand a sick chaumer like an old smoke-dried hielander like herself—na! na! she was na gaun to forsak her leddy, not she"—and fairly drowned in the old Scotchwoman's eloquence, Eleanor was fain to yield and retire to her own room for a few hours.

She was really so nervous and unhappy that she could not sleep; so, after striving to doze for some time in vain, she got up and dressed herself again, determined this time to force Janet from the sick room in her turn. Lady Susan was reading on her entrance, but put away the book when she heard Eleanor's light footstep in the room. One glance told the latter that it was

the Bible, which her ladyship, I am sorry to say, rarely opened when at Leven.

Her countenance was very much changed ; the cheeks had fallen in, and were now quite wasted, and the bones stood out in hungry prominence ; the eyes were hollow, and unnaturally brilliant, with a deep purple circle beneath each. She had grown ten years older in that one night of suffering.

“ I have sent Janet to her bed,” she said, calmly, extending her hand as she spoke ; “ kiss me, love.”

A tear fell on her forehead as Eleanor obeyed. “ It is I that ought to shed tears, child, for you,” she said, smiling faintly.

Eleanor looked up, with her sad, sweet smile, into that countenance, which she felt to be stamped with the lineaments of death.

“ I have done you much wrong, love,” said the old lady, with her *new* gentle voice. “ I have been a very wicked woman, Eleanor, and dare not sue for your forgiveness.”

“ Oh, madam !” gasped Eleanor, falling on her

knees at the side of the bed, and bursting into tears, "how can I listen to such self-condemnation from your lips? It is I that ought to sue for forgiveness."

"No, Eleanor, it is not," said Lady Susan, laying her withered hand solemnly on that bright head. "You have been all that is gentle, loving, and kind; and I, alas!"—a groan finished the sentence, for the moment, and then she went on, with a sort of despair in her look and tones that was very terrible.

"On the death of my husband, Eleanor, I became acquainted with Jasper Vernon, who, being a near connexion of the family, somehow from that time exercised a baneful influence over me. I was not rich, and was very proud; and Vernon worked so on my poverty and my pride that I became bound hand and foot to him; and, however my better feelings, if I had any, warred against such a step, soon became the ready instrument of his dark and hateful plots. He aided me in my need; but would to heaven that I had perished, rather than have lived to see all the misery

and despair I have since endured through his means."

Lady Susan here closed her eyes, and for several minutes lay without speaking.

"On the death of your dear father, child, Vernon, in accordance with the colonel's will, became the arbiter of his children's destinies; and his first step was to place you under my care. A fatal accident discovered to him that Cecil was not the heir of the Delaval estates, and from that day his determination was taken to transfer them to himself. Herbert was a child of a singularly delicate constitution, and the least hardship or cruelty would in all probability remove him out of his way by death. Your father's property could not descend to a female, as it was strictly entailed, and Jasper Vernon then being the next heir, would immediately succeed to a princely fortune."

Eleanor heard but little of all this explanation, for her mind had been arrested by Lady Susan's declaration that Cecil was debarred from his inheritance; it was not, however, until her ladyship

had ceased that she could sufficiently find words to exclaim—

“Cecil not succeed to the inheritance of his family, madam! oh, you are surely deceiving me.”

“Eleanor, I am not,” said her ladyship, solemnly. “Cecil cannot succeed to the Delaval estates.”

“Madam, you must be deceiving me,” exclaimed the tortured young woman, casting a terrified glance around her. “Cecil is the elder son.”

“Such were my exclamations on the villain Vernon’s first acquainting me with the circumstance. But, alas! Eleanor, Cecil is not your brother.”

A sudden gleam of joy for a moment irradiated Eleanor’s pallid face at this terrible announcement. Lady Susan was electrified, for she had naturally expected that her auditor would exhibit every mark of incredulity or sorrow at such a discovery. The happy smile faded almost as suddenly as it had started into being, and Eleanor said, with mournful despair,—

“ Alas ! madam, I cannot believe you.”

Nothing, in all the course of time since her accident, exhibited Lady Susan in a more altered light than did this assertion. She neither looked angry, nor frowned, but said, with the same mournful firmness,—

“ Ah, my child, I do assure you, I only avow the truth : Cecil has none of the Clarendon blood in his veins, love.”

For a moment it flashed through Eleanor's brain that Lady Susan's assertion was actually the truth. Cecil was so unlike what she remembered Colonel Clarendon to have been, and so very unlike Herbert, who was a boyish image of the latter, that she felt shaken in her incredulity. It was so hard, however to destroy the belief of a lifetime, and she had been taught so constantly to regard Cecil as her brother, that her scepticism returned; and, although she did not attempt again to refute Lady Susan's doctrine, she yet listened with such a careless demeanour that, had the latter not been occupied by her own feelings, she might soon have seen that she was preaching to the idle air.

“ It was Vernon’s intention, on getting rid of Herbert, to marry you to some gentleman of fortune, as remote from Delaval as possible, and Norman Macdonald seemed cut out by providence to further his schemes ; alas, Eleanor, my old vow of obedience compelled me to obey him, and I introduced you to each other. How could poor Norman escape the temptation? you were beautiful, gentle, and good, and Norman’s chivalrous and manly nature soon owned the power of your charms. For a time, my guilty fears seemed confounded. I believed that you regarded Norman with the same tender affection, and it was not until after the accident on the lake that I began to tremble. Eleanor, do you love Norman Macdonald?”

“ As a friend, madam, I respect him,” said Eleanor, firmly ; “ but nothing more.”

“ I knew it ! I felt that so unholy a plot could never prosper ; I will not attempt, however, to intrude upon your confidence further ;—poor, poor Norman !”

For the first time, for many years, tears stood

in her cold, grey eyes, and her hand shook over the bright curls on which it rested.

“ All this explanation weakens me, my love,” she said, the next moment, in an altered tone, “ there is nothing more terrible to hear, than the retrospect of a guilty career, such as mine, I fear, has been ; when I am stronger, I will tell you the rest, for I cannot part with life until I have confessed my sins and made atonement as far as lies in me.”

Eleanor rose up, and stood before her with a pitying compassion on her beautiful countenance, that touched the wretched old woman to the heart.

“ Can you say, ‘ I forgive you,’ love ?” she asked, in so imploring a tone, and yet so humiliated and heartbroken, that Eleanor could scarcely restrain her tears.

Eleanor bent over the withered and wasted hand that was stretched towards her, and kissed it.

“ Now, my love, I can venture to carry my prayers for mercy to a more awful tribunal ; lay my Bible and Prayer-book near me, that I may, with a broken and contrite heart, entreat the

blessed Saviour to intercede for me, the chief of sinners ! ”

She said this in a tone so gentle and so humble, that Eleanor's tears fell fast upon the coverlid.

“ It is I that ought to weep, my child,” said the old lady of Leven, mournfully, as she noted her emotion. “ Now leave me ! ”

Eleanor did so, and in the silence of her own chamber, reviewed in her mind all that that once proud and haughty, yet now thoroughly humble and contrite being had told her ; one thing only did she not believe, and that was Lady Susan's assertion, that Cecil was not her brother ; and yet, if he was not !—again the same wild gleam of joy irradiated her countenance, and again the same mournful expression settled down upon it.

She was astonished, after a time, how calm and quiet were her emotions when the first shock of surprise had passed away ; she felt as if a new-found peace had descended upon her spirit, to shed its own holy quietness upon her during such a season of trial and grief, and she carried its holy influence with her into the sick room, her countenance ex-

hibiting it outwardly in the placid calmness and repose by which it was distinguished.

All was hurry, bustle, and confusion in Lady Susan's chamber, when she entered. Janet and a chambermaid were busy packing trunks and portmanteaus, whilst their aged mistress was lying in bed, ready dressed, evidently for a journey.

"Oh, Lady Susan, you cannot—you must not endanger your life in this manner!" cried Eleanor, in absolute terror, as Lady Susan's intentions flashed across her mind. "You will really kill yourself by such a step."

The physician had just told her so in almost the same words; she herself knew that she was dying, and this urged her to dare all to meet and confront Jasper Vernon before she died; she was heroic in a good cause, now that her heart was really touched.

"I can bear all safely, Eleanor," she said, with a smile. "They have put extra cushions in the carriage, and we will drive very slowly; I must see Mr. Vernon without delay!"

"But the exertion will kill you!"

“No—no, I really am much better, and can bear it safely, love ; so get on your clothes, and be ready as quickly as possible. Here, Janet ! ring the bell, and desire Mc Graw to settle the bill ; mind you cord Miss Clarendon’s trunks well ; an old woman’s finery is of little consequence : ” and smiling, and talking gaily, to deceive her companion, the dying woman rattled on, gaily and merrily, until the preparations were all completed, and they came to carry her down to the carriage.

Now it was that her proud spirit showed itself most triumphantly ; now it was that she could smile most naturally and gently, when every nerve writhed with agony and pain : now it was that her voice was firmest, and her eye the brightest, when death was tugging at her heart, and she knew too surely and too well that not many days could elapse, before the miserable farce would be ended, and the cheat discovered. Farce did I say ! alas it was the noblest, the most affecting of tragedies, thus to behold an aged and enfeebled woman smiling down the King of Terrors as she did.

They placed her in the carriage, and for a mo-

ment her eyes closed, and a deadly faintness forewarned her that outraged nature would be revenged.

“ I can only die in the attempt,” was her inward exclamation, as she drove back the sickening sensation ; and when Eleanor sprang in beside her, and began to arrange the shawls and pillows, she whispered gaily, “ Thank you !—thank you—I am very comfortable, my dearest love.”

It was a long and tedious journey, but Lady Susan bore it all with heroic firmness, and never permitted a peevish word or a groan to escape her quivering lips. “ Will you read to me, Eleanor ? ” she asked, after a long pause, in a tone of entreaty infinitely touching and affecting, from those stern, haughty features ; and when Eleanor asked what she should read, she said, with a gentle gesture, “ The Psalms of David, love.”

Eleanor took up Lady Susan’s Bible, and read —“ O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee ; O let my prayer enter into thy presence : incline thine ear unto my calling.

“ For my soul is full of trouble ; and my life draweth nigh unto hell.

“I am counted as one of them that go down into the pit : and I have been even as a man that hath no strength.

“Thine indignation lieth hard upon me : and thou hast vexed me with all thy storms.”

And so Eleanor read on to the end, her auditor repeating the words after her, and sighing bitterly whenever the holy psalmist, by an expression more than usually poignant and contrite, made her feel her own unworthiness and guilt. And then Eleanor turned to that sublime prophecy of Isaiah, in which the inspired prophet foretells the coming of the Messiah, Lady Susan listening with a countenance in which shame and despair seemed struggling with hope for the mastery.

It became too dark at length to read more, and they subsided into silence, Eleanor musing over her own sad and mournful anticipations, which were, she felt, but too surely the precursors of many more, whilst Lady Susan Clarendon grew weaker and more weary with every mile of road they traversed.

CHAPTER III.

THE two children were sitting in the good old doctor's garden, Herbert enjoying the fragrant warmth of the air, and the perfume of the flowers, Sophy flitting about as gay and almost as light-some as a fairy. Herbert had been convalescent nearly a week, and already the good doctor's absence had appeared almost a lifetime to his merry little companion, so difficult is it for children to compute time by a dial.

"Who is your mamma, Sophy?" asked Herbert, who occupied a roomy garden chair, and was not disposed for much exercise just yet.

Sophy shook the shower of curls away from her glowing face, and looked up with an air of bewilderment, as Herbert put this question, with boyish gravity; her little breast heaved, and her

eyes flashed, as she answered,—“ Papa is both papa and mamma to me, I believe.”

The *naïveté* of the answer made Herbert smile. “ And did you never know your mamma, Sophy ? ”

“ Oh yes ! a long time ago I remember having—oh, such a beautiful mamma ! with beautiful black eyes, and a fair, pale skin, who used to kiss me every morning when I stole on tip-toe into her room, and called me her dear Sophy : mamma used always to lie in bed, Herbert.”

“ Was she an invalid, Sophy ? ” asked Herbert, who was very inquisitive.

“ I don’t know what that means,” rejoined Sophy, quickly ; “ only it was so. And then, I remember, one morning when I stole in, mamma did not speak, and when I touched her cheek, it felt—oh, how the cold touch thrilled me ! ” and Sophy burst into a passionate flood of tears, and sat down at Herbert’s feet.

She looked so beautiful, and her beauty was of such a touching character at this moment, that Herbert felt that he had never seen any one so lovely as little Sophy in his life.

“Don’t cry, Sophy, don’t!” said he, kissing the broad, fair forehead that lay upon his knee—“and my dear mamma died too.”

“Did she?” asked the child, lifting up her face with that pretty air of bewilderment that became her childish beauty so well. “And was she cold? and could she not speak to you, Herbert?”

“People never can speak, Sophy, when they are dead,” said Herbert, solemnly. “Their soul has gone up to God, and the body decays and turns to dust again.”

His child-companion crept nearer to him, and stole a fat, chubby arm around his neck; her soul had unconsciously imbibed the greatest mystery of our being, and for a moment she sat buried in thought. At last she looked up, with her radiant smile, and said,—“Mamma lies near the old church there: can you walk so far?”

“I will try,” said the boy.

“Oh, do! and I will show you such a pretty churchyard. The grass grows so green over the graves, and the ivy and roses twine so prettily

over the old belfry, that I often take my book there, and sit for hours when the sun is bright and warm; the sexton is such a queer old man, and quite deaf. I'm rather afraid of him; but you are a boy, and need not care if he grumbles at you. Come, follow me!" and away sped the rosy fairy, with a laugh that made the very woods echo again, so blithe and merry were its tones.

Herbert followed her, more slowly, for he was still feeble and weak, across the flowery garden, along a shady lane, at the end of which stood the churchyard wall, which might have easily passed for a hedge at a little distance, so thick and even was the garland of ivy that clambered over it. Sophy had already pushed open the old-fashioned wicket, and was now kneeling at the side of a grave, the neat head and foot stone, and well-trimmed turf of which, showed that loving hands kept it in perpetual repair.

The setting sunlight fell full upon the old church, lighting up the small diamond shaped panes, until they gleamed in their dark setting of ivy,

like so many stars ; it was a quaint, and old-world looking place, with crumbling turrets, and a wide old Norman porch and tower, from which Sophy's merry voice startled an immense assemblage of starlings and jackdaws, which kept sailing and chattering overhead, as if they were indignant at being disturbed in their aërial dwellings.

Beyond stood the humble vicarage, its grounds separated from those of the church by a slight chain, which seemed scarcely to divide the living from the dead ; it, too, had its diamond casements and ivied porch—its roses, that almost reached the roof—and its humble orchard ; and a moment afterwards, Herbert descried the tall, spare form of the vicar, with his white hair and his broad-brimmed hat, as he walked, in solemn meditation, along the yew-tree alley of his garden.

Herbert then crept up to Sophy's side, and, at the same moment, two men who had been sleeping among the grass, got up and crept away beneath the shadow of the church.

“ Did you not see those men, Herbert ? ” asked

Sophy, when he joined her; "two such great scowling creatures, with black, matted hair, and dark, fierce faces."

"No:—where are they?—which way did they go?" demanded Herbert, who instantly thought of Rudd, whenever he heard of men with fierce scowling faces; "Oh, Sophy, did you know them?" he added, with boyish terror.

"Oh no, I never saw them before," responded the child, who trembled like an aspen leaf; "but do not follow them, dear Herbert."

Herbert looked irresolute. "If it was Rudd?" he asked himself, and the cold sweat stood in great drops upon his forehead.

"Oh, let us go home, Herbert," sobbed Sophy, in childish terror; "They looked so fierce—oh, let us go home!" and she began to run towards her own territories.

Herbert followed her at a slower pace, because he still felt tempted to try and discover whether the man who had terrified poor Sophy so much, was really his old tormentor or not: he would

not have dared to have confronted Rudd for his life, and so he fancied he could have stolen round by the old church, and caught a glimpse of them from a distance ; but all this while he was walking slowly away from them, and through all the rest of the evening he felt haunted with his old terror.

Sophy forgot it almost immediately, for she had none of the fearful recollections of ill-usage and cruelty which had embittered Herbert's boyhood so keenly, and long before she was put to bed for the night, her step was as buoyant, her eye as bright, and her laughter as merry and blithesome, as Herbert had ever known it.

The old servant man came to put him to bed at last, and Herbert, with a sinking heart, followed him up the stairs, and suffered himself to be undressed, and murmured his prayers as fervently as was his wont. A strange, indefinable terror, however, had seized upon his soul, and long after the old man had gone away, and taken the candle with him, did Herbert watch the dim objects around him, in the faint moon-light,

expecting at every moment to see the threatening form of Rudd start into being from amongst them.

And the wind moaned around the old house, and the stars watched the boy with their cold, bright eyes, as he lay in his terror and despair.

CHAPTER IV.

A MILE or more from the old doctor's residence, stood an old house, still called the Kennel, from its having been the head quarters of a pack of celebrated fox-hounds; the hounds were, however, dead many a long and merry year before, and the place was fast falling into decay, when a lawless vagabond, who combined the two opposite callings of poacher and smuggler, took possession of it, unchallenged, and had now lived in it unmolested a dozen years or more,—how, no one cared exactly to inquire.

All around lay dark, silent woods, through which winded a narrow road, full of dangerous ruts and pits, which few dared to fathom, unless

they had business that called them to the Kennel; and this was so seldom, and their visits so few, that the road was now almost lost, and scarcely to be discerned, except by those who had known it perfectly in earlier times.

In its exterior, the Kennel was a long, low, dismal-looking place, weather-stained, and worn, and not apparently kept in the best possible repair. It had been a merry place of yore.

‘ But something ailed it now—the place was cursed’.

and so it got an evil name, and soon became the resort of the idle and the lawless, the smuggler, the poacher, and the highwayman, who were still pretty numerous and strong in those parts even then.

A strange old place was the Kennel, when you did get inside, with great rambling passages, big enough and dark enough to lose yourself in; huge, low-raftered rooms, with immense bay-windows, the ceilings black with age, and the walls grimed with dirt. In fact, it was such a wilderness of a place, that Jacob Speed, its owner or tenant, whichever you may call him, once stowed

away a couple of smugglers, when hard run by the excise, and kept them hid for a week in a room which no one but himself knew the way to.

Speed himself, as we have said, was a smuggler and a poacher, and in his person he seemed to combine the attributes of both. When in his ordinary humour, he had all the slinking slyness and craft that distinguishes the land-species of outlawry, with a slow, drawling voice, a dogged, sullen manner, and a heavy, sallow countenance, which must have been the reason he had never married, he was so ugly. When the devil was aroused within him, however, and his temper was allowed full swing, the whole nature of the animal appeared to be transformed;—he seemed to attain full six inches of extra height, and instead of walking with his gaze upon the ground, and his back almost looking over his head, it was then only that you saw what a powerful build of frame he possessed, and you already felt by anticipation the powerful grasp of those sinewy and athletic limbs.

Then it was that the hoarse, gruff tones of his voice seemed to rise from that deep, broad chest; then it was that his eyes flashed and glared upon you, and the deep veins stood out like whipcord on his scarred and sunburnt brow: and then you saw the bold, daring, and reckless smuggler taking the place of the sly, sneaking, cringing poacher, which he had hitherto appeared.

Never a drop of Jacob Speed's Schnaps and Cognac paid the Queen's duty, no more than did he pay rent for his house, or his hares and pheasants. He sold cheap in whatever he dealt, for he paid little or nothing for his wares, and he pretty soon was extensively patronised by all the lawless vagabonds of the adjoining parishes, who made the rambling old Kennel, as the house still was called, the rendezvous of all their plots and stratagems.

It was to this house that the two men whom we have seen in the churchyard were bending their steps, at the very time that Herbert was lying, quaking with terror, in his snug little bed-room,

in the old doctor's house. One of them knew the place well, for he had been there many a time before, and he now was striding vigorously forward, perfectly indifferent to all the mire and slush he encountered in his progress. He was singing, too, with a powerful and not unmusical voice, some ditty or other, in which Robin Hood and his merry men were the heroes, and the Prior of Bedford was the victim.

“What rare good luck!” exclaimed his companion, who plunged and floundered about, through his ignorance of the road they were traversing.

“What is rare good luck, Rudd, my merry fellow?” inquired Black Dick, pausing in his song.

“Merry be hanged! Will you never stop that accursed pipe of yours?” growled poor Rudd, who had grazed his foot against a tree.

“Why should I?—tira tirala!” sang the other, gaily. “But tell me, what is rare good luck, my buck?”

“ Falling in with the boy, to be sure. It is the little whelp I told you of, if you remember.”

“ When! hang me! that pretty little fellow, all so nicely dressed, cannot be the young hang-gallows you brought to our house a few nights ago? ”

“ But I tell you it is,” retorted Rudd, with an oath; “ I should know him among a hundred.”

“ What do you propose to do, then? I suppose you mean to get him into your clutches again as soon as possible—eh? ”

“ Of course I do. By to-morrow morning, I’ll wager my life we’ll have him trudging alongside of us, wherever we may happen to be going.”

“ How? ”

“ How be hanged! why, by breaking into the house he lives in, robbing it, and then carrying the brat off; that’s easy enough to be done, isn’t it? ”

“ Oh, easy enough,” laughed Black Dick, who was quite as well accustomed to such things as

Rudd himself, and took them quite as carelessly. "Then, if that's the order of the day, I vote we get Speed to give us a good blow out in the way of supper, and plenty of drink into the bargain, and then we'll be ready for the work."

"The very ticket! Push on, and let's get supper ordered as soon as possible; he'll perhaps be able to tell us who this fellow is that's taken my young fledgling under his wing—Curse the darkness, the rutty roads, and the tree stumps, say I!"

Black Dick laughed gaily, and began to sing more gaily, and trudge forward at a quicker pace, Rudd following him as well as the darkness and the mire would allow. At length he stopped, and announced that they were immediately in front of the Kennel, although Rudd was able to discover nothing before them, so great was the darkness of the night.

Black Dick, however, whistled in a peculiar manner, and presently a door was unbarred, and a tall, dark figure appeared in the open doorway,

shading a lighted candle with one hand, whilst with the other he peered wistfully into the dark night without.

“Who is there?” he demanded, in a hoarse, deep voice, that made itself distinctly heard above the din of half-a-dozen ferocious dogs, who leaped and howled around him like demons.

“Lie down with ye, ye whelps!” roared the smuggler host, in a stentorian voice. “What d’ye want here at this time o’ night, my men? and wharfor cannot ye come in honest daylight, like other folk?”

“When did you begin to deal wi’ honest folk, Jacob?” inquired Black Dick, with a sarcastic laugh; “the last time, too, if I remember right, that I was in this country, your visitors were mostly of that sort that preferred the night to the day to pay their visits in.”

“And what if they did?” retorted the smuggler, with a gruff laugh, as he drove the two mastiffs before him into the house; “cannot a man choose his own time to receive his own

friends in? But what's your will, again? and that's a civil question."

"Why, if the coast's clear, we want some supper, and maybe a glass or two of grog, as we've been travelling on fasting stomachs pretty nearly the whole day."

"Come in, then, and welcome," rejoined the other, gaily; "there hasn't a soul crossed my doors to-day."

"All the better," retorted Black Dick; "and if any one should come, good Jacob, let them batter every shutter and panel to powder before you lift bar or undo bolt to admit them."

They were by this time within the house, and Jacob Speed, having barred and locked the door, led them into a lofty room, with a stone floor and a raftered ceiling, in which a good fire was blazing merrily; a large copper was simmering on the fire, from which, when the lid was lifted by a stout lass, who was evidently Jacob's daughter, a delicious odour of blackcock, partridge, and hare tickled the noses of the guests, and made their

mouths water in anticipation of the savoury meal they were presently to sit down to.

“I’ve got some famous double ale, gentlemen,” said Jacob, who had now got the table arranged for supper, and was busily engaged in dishing it up.

“Let’s have a jack of it, Jacob, and put a little in a saucepan on the fire, to mull,” said Black Dick, who certainly contrived at present to monopolise the attention of his host; “there’s nothing warms one so quickly as a drop of mulled ale. Here, Rudd, sit up to table.”

“You look as if you had lived on the backbone of a herring for a month, messmate,” said Jacob, scanning Rudd’s gaunt, half-famished visage with an inquisitive stare.

“Maybe I have, and maybe I haven’t,” growled Rudd, sulkily; “that stew of yours, though, would find a poor devil an appetite under the very jaws of death.”

Jacob Speed smacked his lips, and ladled out a pretty large dishful, which he placed before the surly wretch. “There, fill thy belly full, and then

come again if thou wants more," he said, with a laugh. "Black Dick, thou can help thyself."

"As I have done many a time before, and intend to do many a time again," said the latter, gaily, attacking the hige tureen which stood between Rudd and himself; "and where, pray, do you get all these dainty things? thou must have a wonderful preserve."

"Oh, wonderful," retorted Jacob, wiping his lips, and winking his keen, grey eye, as if it was the best joke in the world; "I have to thank my lord's gamekeepers for it all."

"How?"

"Why, they take my lord's money for watching his game; and so they do in fine nights. But when it blows great guns, and the rain comes down with a will, they lie snug a-bed with their wives, and then I steal out into the preserve, and fill a couple of bags with the poor silly birds in no time."

"A cheap way that, Jacob."

"And a very good one, too," rejoined the other, cagerly. "And who's the worse, pray?"

not my lord, for he can't miss the birds, and I'm sure I'm not."

"Nor we, either," added Rudd, with a sour laugh. "Is that mulled ale ready, Bayles?"

"I'll reach it," said Jacob, starting up; "Judith, you can go to bed," addressing his daughter.

The girl lighted a rushlight, and disappeared; Rudd drew his chair towards the fire, filled his glass, and lighted his pipe.

"Niceish country hereabout," he said, drawing a whiff.

"Pretty well," said Jacob, assentingly; "you are a stranger here, I fancy."

Rudd nodded acquiescence. "That's an abominable road you have through the woods," he said, surveying his boots, which were wofully bespattered with mud.

The landlord laughed, and glanced over to Black Dick.

"Those that take it at night," he said, "know it pretty well in the dark; some of 'em, though, would hardly find their way in the daylight."

“ We passed a very pretty place near the church ; who lives there, pray ? ”

“ An old place, with great balconied windows, and chimneys enough to serve a barrack ? ”

“ Yes, and a sun-dial on the lawn.”

“ Dr. Rivers : he’s away just now.”

This was said significantly, and Rudd fully understood it.

“ Is he rich ? ”

The other nodded, and drank off his glass.

“ You might do very well there,” he said, darting another keen glance at his interlocutor.

“ Any men in the house ? ” inquired Bayles, who had been listening intently all this time.

“ Only one, and two or three women. But they’re all old : a child might do it,” he said, contemptuously.

Rudd glanced over to his confederate, and began to smoke faster than before.

“ I don’t care much for the money,” he said, after a pause, “ although that, of course, is an inducement : but he has a boy.”

“ The one we saw in the churchyard ? ” inquired Bayles.

“ Yes. I showed him to you.”

“ What use can he be to you ? ” asked the two men, in a breath.

“ Much. He somehow escaped from me the night I came to Dover, and I have never clapped eyes upon him since. I must have that boy again Bayles.

“ And welcome, too, for what I care,” rejoined Black Dick, carelessly. “ As long as I go halves with the ready, I don’t care for a beggar’s whelp like that.”

“ He is no beggar’s whelp, I promise you,” retorted Rudd, gruffly. “ He would heir many a broad acre, if he came to manhood.”

“ Which you, of course, will do your best to prevent,” said the other, at random.

“ Perhaps. There are more than one interested in that ; ” and Rudd began to smoke again.

“ I suppose you never try your hand at this kind of thing, now, Jacob,” said Bayles, sipping

his ale, and staring into the fire. "It wouldn't be safe, in your position."

"Never so near home," said Jacob, gravely ; "it might get me into trouble : and for that reason you must not attempt to come back here, as the Kennel will be the very first place they'll search after it's found out. Which road will you take ?"

"To London," said Rudd, decisively, although he intended taking quite a contrary one ; "it's always safe ;" and he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and refilled it.

The three men sat up talking, in a low, cautious tone, until midnight had struck, and then Rudd and Black Dick, swallowing a stiff tumbler of brandy apiece, enveloped themselves in a couple of loose cloaks, for which Rudd paid Jacob Speed liberally, and, having discharged the reckoning, the pair sallied forth upon their enterprise.

The night had now changed to wet, and, as the rain came drifting upon their faces, each congratulated himself upon the favourable nature of

the weather, which was certainly dark and blustering enough for any enterprise; and, armed with a dark lantern and a crowbar, Bayles struck bravely forward, closely followed by Rudd, who did not on this occasion anathematize either the ruts he encountered or the stumps of trees with which his shins came in contact.

CHAPTER V.

HERBERT was asleep in bed.

He was dreaming gaily, poor little fellow, of his papa, his pony, and his dogs; for he was, in fancy, at Delaval once more. Oh, happy, happy dreams! Oh, delightful visions that, overleaping time and space, carry us back once more to childhood's merry spring-time! The prisoner in his cell recks not of the darkness and the iron chain; he sees once again the low-roofed cottage, with his mother and her noisy band seated in the porch, and the orchard, the scene of many a joyous game. The poor little sempstress, weary and pale with many a nightly vigil, hears again the lazy drone of the mill-wheel that lulled her childhood's dreams, when the world was not one endless task,

and gusset and band and cross-stitch were to her things unknown,—when the year was one eternal summer, for it was all summer then, and the flowers she culled were nature's handiwork, and not her own. Oh, happy dreams! oh, balm of weary hearts! the oil that makes life's wheels go easily in this eternal round of toil! Oh, blessed dreams, whose only sting is that we awake, and find that ye are the "baseless fabric of a vision," that "leaves not a wreck behind!"

Suddenly he was awake by a cold breath of air blowing upon his face. He started up in bed, and screamed out in his terror, for there were dark forms at the window, looming out preternaturally vast and threatening in the dimness of the morning. They were wrenching away the bars that protected the lattice. Now they fall, and a man springs lightly into the room. Herbert takes refuge beneath the bed-clothes, never daring to cry out, even if he could, although fear would not allow him now to speak in a whisper.

"Leave him to me," growled a voice he knew,

alas ! only too well, “ and you stand at the door, and fell down the first that comes through.”—He heard no more, for a sickening sensation came over him. He had an indistinct recollection of being seized by Rudd’s powerful hands, and the next instant fainted.

When he came to himself again he was lying on some wet grass, apparently in an extensive wood, for there were trees around and above him, and the sound of running waters nigh at hand. The men—there were two of them—were leaning over him, whispering eagerly to each other, whilst one ran his coarse, rough hand rapidly across his face, for it was impossible to see whether he was sensible or not.

“ We must run on to B——,” whispered Rudd, rapidly “ If you will carry the bag, I will take the brat on my shoulder.”

Herbert then felt himself hoisted up in the air, and carried rapidly forward. The cold air presently revived him, and he began to be aware of his misfortunes. The heaviest of these was

that he was once more in Rudd's power, and this of itself was a heavy calamity enough for him to bear. Added to this, however, he was still weak and faint from recent illness, and would inevitably sink down under the new hardships that would fall to his lot if he remained long in this man's power.

Herbert's misfortunes had taught him fortitude. He did not lose heart even at this wretched moment, but kept every sense on the alert, in the hope of catching something from the conversation of the two men that would aid him in his escape.

As the day dawned he could discern the features of Rudd's associate, whom he soon found to be neither Bams nor Bunting. The man, in fact, was a total stranger to him. Had he to hope or to fear from this circumstance? he asked himself twenty times. Time only could show.

He noticed that this man carried a bag, in which was stowed away, in all probability, the poor old doctor's plate. A pang shot through his heart as he remembered how gaily the doctor had

set off the preceding night to London, in search of Cecil and Mr. Dalton. Then he pictured to himself the bitter disappointment they would all experience when they returned and found him gone, perhaps for ever ; and this really did bring the tears into his eyes, and he could scarcely forbear weeping aloud.

“ Can you stand, young ’un ? ” growled Rudd, lowering him to the ground after they had walked a few miles.

“ I will try, sir,” was the poor lad’s submissive reply ; and he began to crawl feebly after them. Rudd soon slackened his pace, on perceiving that he could not keep up with them, and then each taking a hand, they dragged rather than led him forward. Long before they reached B——, they found the road thronged with people ; it was apparently a holiday ; for they were all dressed out in their best, and were in the highest spirits. Rudd at first was inclined not to continue their journey in this direction, but after a hurried consultation with Black Dick, they resolved to go

forward, Rudd hoisting Herbert on his shoulders once more.

As they approached the town every lane and pathway swelled the crowd of which they now formed a part. Young and old, the lame and the blind, all seemed bound to one goal, and all trudged forward as gaily as if to a wedding or a feast. Carried onwards by the multitude, they continued to follow in their wake until they had reached the Castle Hill, and then the secret of all this concourse of people was explained. In the midst of a wide square, which was now filled with a moving sea of heads, over against the county jail, a gallows reared its hideous machinery, black and threatening. A couple of coiners were to be executed that morning, and the surrounding country poured forth its inhabitants by thousands to see them die.

An hour had yet to elapse, and Rudd, separating himself from the crowd, whispered Black Dick to follow him, and led the way to a dark and dirty alley which communicates with that part of the

town in which the Jews and marine-store dealers lived. Here they soon found a house, the landlord of which not only could give them a good breakfast, but was willing to exchange Herbert's new clothes for considerably older ones, and expressed his willingness to find a customer for the poor old doctor's plate as well. By the time all this was over, the time of the execution had nearly arrived, and the two men hurried away to witness it, Rudd carrying Herbert along with him to prevent the possibility of his escaping.

The crowd was much more densely packed now than it had been on their leaving the hill, and it was not without some difficulty they contrived to push themselves forward until they arrived immediately in front of the gibbet, which was not more than twenty yards distance from the place they occupied.

Presently the deep tolling of the bell announced their approach, and Herbert, sick with excitement and terror, turned away his head to escape the dreadful sight. Rudd and his companion, how-

ever, had no such compunctions. Strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that these two men, who every day committed crimes for which the gallows was the only effectual punishment, and who might, therefore, seem to stand in salutary terror of its horrors, gloated on the spectacle that was now about to present itself to their eyes, and actually shivered with impatience until the victims appeared.

First came the gaol chaplain, habited in white, reading the service for the dead; and after him—how the sight made Rudd start, and sent the blood back to his heart!—stalked a gaunt, gigantic figure, whose reckless bearing, aided by a fierce and undaunted countenance, caused an audible thrill through the vast concourse of spectators, and in whom Rudd recognised, to his horror, his old companion and associate Spike. The whole scene reeled around him,—hangman, gallows, crowd, and victim—and he nearly fell to the ground, so strong was the revulsion of feeling it caused him.

Another shout, and cursing his own soft-heartedness, the housebreaker looked up again. A short, squat, plump figure, dressed in the cast-oil' finery of a huntsman, sadly faded and worn, which lent a tragic hideousness to the affair, met his view ; the eyes rolled and leered on the hushed and silent crowd, whilst the grotesque features, which all the terror of his position could not subdue, worked convulsively, evidently from strong and painful emotion ; suddenly the poor wretch's eye lighted on Rudd, notwithstanding all the latter's efforts to escape notice, and in a moment their whole expression changed.

" There is one gone ! " cried a thousand stentorian voices, blending themselves into one terrific roar. " Ah ! ah ! he dies hard ! look ! look ! " and again the howl swelled up its terrific diapason to the eternal vault of heaven.

Poor Bams heard it not ! he saw not when Spike made the fatal leap ;—with his eyes riveted on Rudd, watching his motions with sickening interest, he leaned forward over the platform as if

he would have cleared the space between them if he could.

Rudd with an effort turned himself round so as to escape the fearful sight, and in another minute another howl rose up around him. "He is dead now," whispered Black Dick, gruffly, in his ear; and looking up, the housebreaker saw two stiff, senseless figures swinging back and forward in the wind before him.

CHAPTER VI.

LURKING like a spider in the web he had woven for so many of the characters of this history, Jasper Vernon beheld with terror and dismay the evil influences that seemed to counteract all his deep-laid and skilfully-conceived plots and machinations. Dalton, the terrible and omnipotent Dalton, was already on his traces, and, sooner or later, he felt that all would be discovered; the mine was already sprung, and it only needed time and patience to work out the end.

He was sitting in his gloomy and dreary dining-room one evening, just after dinner, in no very happy mood, thinking of all this, between the pauses of sipping his claret and peeling his walnuts, and endeavouring to make up his mind to do something decisive in the present posture of

affairs—with his thin legs resting on the fender, his keen, thin face supported by one hand, turned upon the flashing firelight, wasted, worn, yet still with indomitable resolution stamped in on every keen, emaciated feature, as if with aqua-fortis.

He had not much money by him just then, or he would have fled the country at once, and left all the rest to fate. There had been a terrible drain upon the splendid rental of Delaval, which he had found it impossible to avoid paying, and which, reckoning on the success of his plans, with regard to Colonel Clarendon's children, as certain, he had not hesitated to make. Had he but foreseen how events would have turned out, he would have retained it for a time, and then all might have been well.

And now, to be left with only a few miserable hundreds, when he might have commanded thousands,—there was torture in the thought! and with a bitter oath he started up, and began to pace the room with hasty steps.

His own fortune was so paltry as to be of little

service at such a juncture. A few hundred acres of poor, hungry land, which had ruined every tenant that ventured to farm it, with a character too well known in the market to tempt an unwary capitalist to embark his money in, was scarcely likely to serve him in his present need. Besides, there were strange stories current in the country now, by whom invented or promulgated none cared to know, that would deter him from attempting to convert his patrimony into money at the present moment, even had he been ever so anxious to do so.

To stay and brave it out, was all that remained for him to do,—do that he must, and he at once began to steel his mind to adopt this alternative. Jasper Vernon was a coward at his heart, and a pleasant thing it was when he returned to his chair to picture to himself the wrath of Dalton and the vengeance of Cecil Clarendon, when all their pursuit ended, as he foresaw it would do, in disappointment.

The reader will bear in mind all that this man

had done to poison the happiness of so many people—Cecil, Eleanor, the Daltons, Herbert,—and now, added to these, was Lady Susan, more terrible than all! for she only knew all his base villany and deceit. Only that morning he had received a letter in her stiff, masculine hand, telling him that she was already on her journey to England, with the intention of arraying herself in the enemy's ranks.

How he cursed poor Herbert, who was the innocent cause, as he had been the victim of his plots. Then, with a strange, dreamy wonder, he began to speculate upon the poor child's fate, and whether he was still alive or not. He shuddered, as he listened to the pattering of the rain on the windows, and drew, with a mighty sense of relief, nearer to the cheerful blaze, and stirred the logs, that sent a shower of sparks up the black, cavernous chimney.

Presently, he was aroused from his reflections by a quick loud knock at the door.

"Come in!" he cried, trembling, although he knew it could only be a footman.

"If you please, sir, there's a message from the Blue Boar, that a lady desires to see you immediately."

"To see me?" ejaculated Jasper, who instantly concluded it to be Lady Susan. "Was there no name mentioned, James?"

"No, sir; the helper only said the lady was mortal bad, and that you hadn't to be long in going, for fear it was over late."

"What could be meant by being too late?" thought the cowardly wretch, as he made his preparations for setting out with a foreboding heart. "Too late!"

The words rung in his ears with fatal significance, as he plashed through the rain and mud on his way to the village inn, and it was not until he was in the presence of the stern old lady of Leven, that he understood to their full import the meaning of those mysterious words.

CHAPTER VII.

THE good old doctor never rested until he had arrived in London, and even then, the only delay he permitted himself to make, was to snatch a hasty breakfast, wash and arrange his toilet, and then drive at once to Mivart's, where, fortunately, he remembered of old, that Dalton was in the habit of staying when in town.

To his eager inquiries whether they knew if Mr. Dalton was in England, the waiter informed him, to his astonishment, that Mr. Dalton was not only in England, but actually in the house at that very moment. The old doctor scribbled a few lines on an address card, requesting an interview, and desired the man to carry it upstairs.

“ I will do so, sir, although I am afraid it will stand you of little service,” was the civil rejoinder; “ for Mr. Dalton is very busily engaged, just now, and not at all well in health besides.”

“ Make the attempt, notwithstanding,” said Dr. Rivers, slipping a crown piece into his hand. “ I am sure he will see me when he knows who it is.”

Presently a message came down, begging the good old man to walk upstairs, and up he went, accordingly, his heart throbbing as violently as if he had been a young man of twenty, on the eve of seeing his mistress. The door opened, and Edward Dalton, stately, majestic, and dignified, even in his grief, stood before him.

“ I am sorry, my dear doctor, I can give you so poor a welcome, just now,” said he, in his calm, sweet voice, as he grasped with kindly pressure the hand of his old and venerable friend. “ At the present moment I am engaged in a very painful search.”

Something surely prevented the dear old man

at this moment from explaining all in a breath, for, after vainly attempting to speak, he allowed Dalton to proceed—

“ This gentleman is Mr. Cecil Clarendon.”

“ Poor little Herbert’s brother !” exclaimed the doctor, with a great effort.

Dalton looked surprised, for he knew that Colonel Clarendon had held no communication with his old friend for several years, simply because they had ceased to live in the same neighbourhood.

“ One night,” said the doctor, glancing round the company, for Norman Macdonald was there as well, with his placid smile, “ I was called up out of my warm bed by a poor fisherman, to visit a child who, as he said, was in a high fever, which was certainly only the truth. I had never seen anything so wasted and emaciated as the appearance of the poor little fellow, who, it seems, had been picked up, a night or two before, on the beach by this honest fellow, the man with whom he had been travelling having fallen over the quay

at Dover, and been drowned. A merciful providence spared the poor boy's life, and, after a few days, I had him removed to my own house, where fresh country air, and a generous diet, have so far restored him that he now resembles in some sort the Herbert Clarendon of earlier and happier days.

"Herbert Clarendon!" echoed Cecil, falling on his neck in a paroxysm of tears. "Is poor Herbert found at last?"

"He is," said the doctor, kindly embracing him. "I left him in a fair way of recovery; and I trust, by the time we all get down there again, he will be as strong and as well as ever he was in his life."

Cecil heaved a deep sigh, and seemed to be endeavouring to realize in his own mind the startling intelligence the good old man had just communicated to him.

"Much yet remains to be done, my friend," said the latter, addressing Dalton. "The suffering and misery the poor little fellow has undergone

would wring the hardest heart; and a day of retribution, even in this world, is surely in store for the heartless authors of his wretchedness. A villain whom he calls Rudd—”

Dalton started, but instantly recovered himself, and continued to listen to the doctor's explanations with every outward exhibition of calmness.

“ And who, by his description, must be a monster of cruelty, has, it seems, dragged him through the country in a condition not one whit better than that of a common beggar. The poor little fellow, it seems, escaped from his inhuman tyrant shortly after falling into his hands, and found an asylum in the house of a humane blacksmith, from which Rudd, in turn, tore him away; and since then his lot has been cast amidst the lowest scenes of human guilt and degradation. From this he has at length been happily rescued, and nothing now remains to be done but to restore him to the care of those from whom he has the best right to look for protection. As for Rudd and his guardian, Mr. Vernon—”

“ Their punishment, if delayed, will only be the fuller and more fearful,” said Dalton, in a terrible voice. “ That may be safely left to me, my dear friend. And now, my valet shall get a fresh carriage, that shall hold the whole of us, and, with four good posters, we will soon annihilate time and space, and make poor Cecil happy.”

Williams was accordingly despatched to Long Acre, to procure a travelling carriage, and four horses having been put to it, Dalton, Dr. Rivers, Norman, and Cecil, set off in the gayest possible spirits towards Dover.

“ If I might proffer a prayer,” said the good old doctor, drawing up the glass, as they rolled out of Rochester, where they had snatched a hurried luncheon, “ it would be that you will consent to leave Herbert with me for a time. As you know, Mr. Dalton, I am an old man, with nothing but one dear child, left me as a death-bed legacy by a very dear friend, to expend my affection upon ; and, as this darling is a little girl, just about Herbert’s age, I would take it as a great kindness

if you would permit Herbert to be her companion, until your own plans with regard to him are definitively settled."

"I have no possible objection to such a plan," said Dalton, grasping his hand; "and, as his guardian"—

"And I, as his brother," interposed Cecil, "cheerfully accede to Dr. Rivers's request. It would, in fact, complete my happiness."

Dalton sighed, and looked troubled. The secret he had so long and faithfully kept must be divulged ere long. But not now! not now! and he endeavoured to talk unconcernedly of the arrangements with respect to Herbert which Cecil and the doctor were now discussing with the greatest interest.

In spite of himself, however, sad and solemn thoughts took possession of his mind, and, as the day gradually darkened in upon them, these musings became so painful and absorbing that it was with absolute relief he at last heard the doctor exclaim—

“ We are at our journey’s end, gentlemen. Will you alight ? ”

Cecil sprang out, followed by Norman and the two elder travellers. They were standing in front of a plain, unpretending lodge, which formed the entrance to pleasure grounds, evidently of great beauty, and which looked doubly lovely in the soft moonlight.

Norman’s arm was a positive help to Cecil, as they walked up the carriage sweep towards the house, so helpless had the state of nervous impatience he suffered rendered him. The door was flung open, displaying a handsome hall, lit up, with the old man-servant standing on the steps.

“ Where is Master Herbert ? ” cried the doctor, from a little distance.

“ Oh, my dear old master ! ” faltered the old domestic, in a broken voice, “ we have had nothing but misery since you left.”

“ But the boy—where is he ? ” demanded his master, with a sudden sinking of the heart, alarmed

at the look of dismay the old man's face displayed.

“ Bring the boy, immediately.”

“ Oh, papa ! dear papa !” cried Sophy, rushing into the old man's arms, and hiding her tear-stained face on his breast ; “ some horrid nasty men have torn dear, dear Herbert away with them.”

“ Oh, my God !” groaned the wretched old man, as the fatal truth burst upon him. “ After all, our labour has been in vain.”

He was startled by a heavy, dull sound behind him, and, on looking round, perceived that Cecil had fainted.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN a room, sordid even in its neatness, Lady Susan Clarendon lay struggling hard with death. Inch by inch she contended with the grim destroyer, for the love of life was still strong within her; and slowly, quietly, yet surely, the terrible avenger was gathering his forces for victory. Death was stamped upon her brow and written on her heart, and now she had nothing but to adjust her mantle, that her fall might be a becoming one at last.

Even in death, the indomitable will and nerve that had carried her triumphantly through so much, did not desert her. Ill in body, and wretched in mind, she still gave vent neither to murmur nor complaint; but, convinced at length

that her hour was come, proceeded to set her house in order, and make such reparation to those she had injured, as was still in her power.

“Bring your chair to the bedside, my love,” she said, scarcely able to repress a sigh, as her languid gaze took in at a glance the well-darned, well-worn check hangings that adorned the crazy bed, the sanded floor, with a bit of flaring red-and-green carpet in the centre, the paltry dressing-table, with its cracked looking-glass that libelled the human face divine whenever you looked into it, and the two or three flimsy chairs that flanked the naked walls, and then contrasted it in her own mind with her dressing-room at Leven, luxurious in gilded fauteuils and mirrors, Turkey carpets, Sevres cabinets, and costly bijouterie. “Draw your chair nearer, my love, and listen to what I have to say; for something tells me, Eleanor, that, ere many days are over, my lips will be silent for ever in this world.”

“My dear aunt,” said Eleanor Clarendon, in the sweet tones the dying woman had learnt to

love so well, using the term of affection their connexion had sanctioned, "if what you wish to say would distress you, pray defer it to another time."

"No—no—no!" cried the dying woman, with all her old peremptoriness of manner, "there is no time like the present for discussing what is now in my mind; how can I tell whether I shall be alive to-morrow to tell it?"

Eleanor could not restrain her tears, but sat sobbing in her chair, with all the abandonment of grief. Then Lady Susan, stealing a withered hand out from under the bed-clothes, clasped one of the hot, soft hands of her protégée, and said, in a tone of unusual tenderness—

"Can you forgive me, love, for the part I played in wishing to force you to marry poor Norman Macdonald?"

"Why need you disturb yourself about that affair, madam?" said Eleanor, in a broken voice. "Mr. Macdonald, I am afraid, would have acted just as he did, had he been left to himself."

“No, child, he would not,” rejoined her companion, sternly; “one word from me, at the outset of your acquaintance, would have immediately driven all ideas of love out of his head,—Norman Macdonald has been so accustomed from childhood to act by my wishes.”

A faint—very faint smile was perceptible on Eleanor’s delicately beautiful face, as the proud old woman said this in her usual determined tone.

“Yes, Eleanor, you may smile,” continued Lady Susan, in a gentler tone; “and yet, strange as it may sound, I have been the mainspring that has set all Norman Macdonald’s impulses in motion from boyhood. I rescued him from a situation of imminent peril, at the risk of my own life, and from that day may date an influence on his destinies which I would now had never existed.”

“But can such submission to the will of another—and especially that of a woman—accord with the well-known manliness of Mr. Macdonald’s character?” inquired Eleanor, gra-

dually forgetting, in the interest she felt in the dialogue, how imminent was the peril to which it exposed her companion ; “I have heard Eric Dennison describe him—”

“Poor Eric !” sighed Lady Susan, sadly. “I shall never look on him and my gentle Lucy more.” For once, tears stood in those keen, cold eyes, and they even fell upon her cheeks, as she added, “when I am dead, Eleanor, I could wish you to take up your abode with Eric and his noble-minded daughter, until Cecil rejoins you, if that should ever be. I suppose poor Norman has no chance of finding you a retreat ?”

“None ;” was the calm reply. “Mr. Macdonald and I are henceforth nothing to each other.”

“I will not attempt to controvert your determination, however I may deplore it,” said Lady Susan, sadly. “Poor, poor Norman !”

“Ah, madam, he will soon meet with many more worthy of him,” said Eleanor, modestly ; “a simple country girl, like myself, without either beauty or fortune, will surely never disturb

the peace of mind of such a being as Mr. Norman Macdonald."

Lady Susan sighed, and relaxed the throbbing hand she held within her own, and at that moment her attendant announced Mr. Jasper Vernon!

Lady Susan attempted to raise herself in bed, as he entered the room, and then sank back again with a stifled groan. Eleanor was beside her in a moment, supporting her in her arms, whilst their awed and yet audacious visitor, conscious that he was playing a losing game, attempted to fortify his courage by a false temerity, and advancing up the room, exclaiming as he did so,—

"Is it possible, my dear Lady Susan, that I see you lodged in such a miserable hovel as this? Why, there is not even a carpet to the floor," calling up a look of disgust, as his foot came in contact with the beggarly rag that did duty in that capacity; "a beggar could not be worse lodged than your ladyship!"

“Such as it is, the accommodation is good enough for me,” said her ladyship, calmly. “What matters it, whether we go out of the world in a palace or a hovel? the soul can surely wing its way to its Creator as quickly from the one as the other!”

“But, the rank of your ladyship!”

“Rank, and all its earthly privileges, are fast fading from my view,” was the calm rejoinder of the dying woman; “but it is not to bandy compliments with you, Jasper Vernon, that I desired to see you now.”

“If you would make use of my house,” said Jasper, with an affectation of timidity, “it would, I can assure you, be heartily at your service; and, at any rate, you would be properly waited upon there.”

“I have my own servants!” said Lady Susan, haughtily; “when I am gone, they will, I trust, remain to protect Miss Clarendon in her lonely position, until Mr. Eric Dennison’s arrival,—but, enough of this; I have come a long, and, as it has

proved, by God's good will, a fatal journey, to demand, at your hands, that justice should be done to the children of Colonel Clarendon ! ”

“ My dear Lady Susan,” stammered Jasper, affecting to be very much astonished at a speech he had expected from the first, “ I am really not aware that Colonel Clarendon's family have any grievances to be redressed ! ”

“ They have, sir ! ” said her ladyship, raising herself up in bed with a great effort ; “ dare you carry out the miserable—nay, awful farce you have invented so long, even in the very presence of your dying accomplice ? Beware, Jasper Vernon, how you venture to trifle with me ! ”

“ At any rate permit Miss Clarendon to retire for a few minutes,” pleaded Jasper, humbly ; “ her remaining here can serve no good turn—”

“ You are afraid, I suppose, to exhibit our guilt before eyes so pure,” said Lady Susan, scornfully. “ Let it be, however, as you will ; Eleanor, my love, leave us for a time.”

, Eleanor complied, and Jasper Vernon having

followed her to the door, locked it after her, and then creeping back to the bed sat down again with his hands supporting his head.

Lady Susan, too, remained silent for a few minutes, struggling apparently with her own emotions. At last she resumed in a voice whose hoarse and altered tones terrified even her crafty confederate himself.

“Rapacious as a wolf, and bloodthirsty as a tiger, you would have driven out these poor children from their birthright, and have suffered them to live or die as God willed it, had not a power higher than your own ordained it otherwise. Your first act was to quarrel with Mr. Cecil Clarendon.”

“Cecil Dalton, you mean, madam,” said Jasper Vernon, spite for the moment getting the better of his craft.

“Cecil Dalton!” echoed the dying woman, a vivid streak of red for a moment lighting up her pallid cheek. “In the name of all that is holy how did you acquire that information? There

are two others only living that know it beside myself."

"It matters not," retorted Jasper, triumphantly; "it is quite sufficient for my purpose that I do know it. The young man, methinks, sufficiently resembles Edward Dalton to lead one to the supposition of his parentage."

"But there is Herbert," cried Lady Susan, eagerly. "He, at any rate, is a Clarendon."

"What if I should tell you," said Jasper, suddenly lifting himself up, and looking her steadily in the face with those cold, vipers' eyes of his, "that Herbert Clarendon can never more trouble either you or I, Lady Susan!"

"Oh God!" groaned the wretched woman, sinking back upon her pillows. "Herbert Clarendon dead!"

"Herbert Clarendon dead!" echoed Jasper Vernon, with his icy stare, gradually rising from his seat.

A convulsive shudder shook Lady Susan's frame, as his words penetrated even to the heart

whose pulsations it almost stopped, then with an expiring effort she raised herself up once more, until she sat up erect in bed,—stern, lofty, and threatening as she had been in her haughtiest days,—no trace of death upon that awful brow, no dimness in the glance of that eagle eye, firm in voice and unswerving in intellect, piercing him through and through with every glance and every word, as she heaped imprecations and curses, vengeance and threats of future misery on his head.

“Thou hast robbed the fatherless and despoiled their heritage! and yet what am I saying? Herbert Clarendon is not dead,—that beautiful child had nothing in common with death! Oh what a wolf in sheep’s clothing did poor Clarendon place over his little fold,—and then to come here with thy cozening lies to tell me of poor little Herbert’s death.”

“My dear Lady Susan,” began Vernon—

“Hush! hush!” said the dying woman, in an altered tone, “there is Clarendon himself,

see!" and her companion in his terror noted that her eyes, which until now had been fixed fiercely upon himself, were resting vaguely on the opposite side of the room—"with his poor, gentle wife, and the babe she died in giving birth to; they are beckoning of me, Jasper—Hush!"

He felt the beatings of his own heart in the deadlike silence that followed her last word.

Gradually a gentle smile spread itself over the harsh features of the dying woman; a tender light for a moment gleamed in the depth of those dark grey eyes, and with a whispered, "I am coming!" she sank back amongst the pillows; and it needed not the rattle in the throat, the convulsive clenching of the hands, or the feeble quivering of the unconscious limbs to tell him that it was death!

Horror-struck, and trembling in every limb, he staggered to the door and called loudly for help. Eleanor was in the room in a moment, closely followed by Lady Susan's maid, whilst one or two women, belonging to the inn, be-

wildered, yet inquisitive even in their terror, crowded about the door.

“Attend to your mistress!” said he, looking wildly round upon them, like a man suddenly aroused from a hideous dream. “I will run for the doctor, although I fear it is too late!” and before they could stop him he was gone.

A wild terror took possession of Eleanor’s mind, as she approached the bed. Lady Susan’s presentiment had already prepared her for what was about to happen, and one glance at the still open yet glassy eye, and fixed expression of countenance assured her, that with Lady Susan Clarendon earth had passed away for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH her last terrible maledictions still ringing in his ears, he went home to brood over all she had said. Jasper Vernon was a coward even when successful, and on this eventful evening it was not likely he would overcome his constitutional failing. A strange, uneasy terror kept possession of him all through the way home, for it was very dark in the long lonely avenue that stretched nearly the whole way from the outskirts of the village to his own house ; and his own guilty conscience readily conceived a thief in every bush he passed.

When within twenty yards of his own door, however, he became conscious—how, he scarcely knew, for it was far too dark to see anything—that some one was dodging him. With a palpitating

heart he increased his pace, and then the figure crossed over the pathway and stood right before him, blocking up the way so effectually as entirely to prevent his passing.

“What in the name of God do you want, man?” he exclaimed in a trembling voice, repressing his first inclination to cry out for help, for something told him that this man might have some connexion with the scene he had just left.

“I have waited a very long time for you, sir,” said a gruff voice, which sounded strangely familiar to his ears, but where or when he had heard it he could not remember. “I dare not come up to the house in the daylight, for fear they should drive me away again without seeing you. I found out, however, that you were out, and so I determined to hang about the shrubberies until you came back.”

“For what?” thought Vernon, a cold sweat starting out of every pore of his skin. “Could the man intend to murder or rob him?” and again the cowardly desire to cry out for aid took

possession of him, and again the powerful grasp of his companion, who had by this time laid his hand upon his shoulder, took away all power of speech.

“ You shall reckon all my waiting in the cold and wet in, when we settle, Mr. Vernon,” said the man with a gruff laugh. “ But enough of this just now ; I want to see a good blazing fire, and what is still more to the purpose, a tumbler of hot grog and some meat, or I shall die outright, and then my death will be laid at your door.”

“ In God’s name come in, and let me see who you are,” cried Jasper Vernon with an effort, and without saying another word he dragged the man after him up to the door, and whispering to him to be silent, led him along the gloomy passage and stairs that had so frightened poor Herbert in his earlier days of misery, until he came to his own study, the door of which he unlocked very quietly, and pushed the man before him into the room.

He lingered behind for a moment himself as the man strode in, under pretence of taking out the

key, that he might be able to lock it again on the other side to prevent intrusion ; but for all this he only pretended to lock it, as he very well knew that no one in that well drilled establishment would venture to intrude upon them.

The man had thrown himself into an arm-chair by this, and was basking in the welcome warmth of the fire. A lock of grizzled hair of a dark hue concealed his forehead and the upper part of his face, and although otherwise very much altered, Jasper Vernon knew that herculcan frame and those stern gaunt features too well to doubt for one moment whom his visitor really was.

“ I thought you were hung or drowned before this, Rudd,” he said, with bitter malignity, which he strove in vain to repress, as he came up to the fire-place. “ You have taken care to keep me in ignorance of your movements long enough to justify such a suspicion.”

“ No thanks to you if I am not,” retorted the other, without altering a feature, as he stooped

down to warm his rough coarse hands. "I have done enough in my turn for you to entitle one of us to swing for it: and as I'm a poor devil, and you by all accounts are a rich one—how, the devil only knows—why I suppose I would be the scape-goat if needs were."

"You're exceedingly cynical," said Jasper Vernon, sarcastically, as he opened a buffet, and produced a liquor stand. Pouring out a tumbler of Hollands, he handed it to the vagabond, with the observation—

"I know you can toss that off without waiting for hot water. And now tell me, to what happy circumstance am I indebted for the honour of your visit, Rudd?"

Rudd drained the glass at a draught, and replaced it upside down upon the table, turning his flushed, fierce face upon his host as he did so. His small, fiery eyes made even Jasper Vernon shudder.

"What would you say, Mr. Vernon, if I came with the joyful tidings that I was about to bring

back the youngster you have been harrying the country to find out? Wouldn't you be delighted to recover him again?"

Jasper Vernon could have struck him down as he sat gloating in his triumph at the confusion of face he knew he must be betraying to this coarse brute. A curse, smothered in its birth, but still plainly audible to Rudd's quick ears, did escape him even then, but that was all. He heard it all as calmly as if shame and destruction did not stare him in the face at the announcement.

"You mean young Clarendon, I suppose," he said, at last, in a calm voice.

"Come, come, Mr. Vernon, you needn't pretend that now!" cried Rudd, gruffly: "who else should I mean?"

"How should I know?" retorted the other, bitterly. "You may have twenty plots afoot at the same time, for I know of old you're not very scrupulous when times are bad with you."

"I'm what other folk have made me, and yourself among the number," growled the other,

sulkily. "If rich folk aren't very nice about the means they employ to get their wealth, a poor hang-gallows like me cannot be expected to be over particular."

Vernon poured himself out a glass of brandy, which he drank off, and then refilled Rudd's with the Hollands; and as his visitor sipped it he said, "Now let us understand each other, Rudd: what is all this rigmarole about the boy?"

"Enough to make you shake in your shoes, Master Vernon," said Rudd, triumphantly: "he's not much more than a stone's throw from this very room we're sitting in;" and he watched the other's countenance with keen interest, under the expectation that he would detect the confusion such an announcement was calculated to produce.

Vernon, however, had served too long an apprenticeship to deception to exhibit such a weakness, now that he was prepared for such an evil, and his calm, placid manner almost drove Rudd mad, as he said,—

“Herbert really returned! the poor child is actually alive then, after all he must have gone through.”

“I can swear to that,” growled Rudd, with an oath; “although, as matters be, you’d as lief he had never turned up again in this world, Mr. Vernon. As you are so pleased, however, I may as well just carry him on to London, and deliver him up to those he won’t care to run away from;” and he jumped up from his seat, and began to button the sailor’s jacket he wore, with sulky passion.

“Stop! stop! stop! we are not done with each other yet,” cried Jasper, trying to force him down into his seat,—“or stay! step into this closet for a moment, Rudd,” opening the door of a small room, and pushing the man in, “whilst I ring for supper.”

“What will be the use of wasting time here?” retorted the man, who seemed to have taken his cue, and was now as bearish and untractable as even Jasper Vernon could desire, and his huge

form blockaded up the doorway as he spoke,—“I can get a bellyfull elsewhere, and no thanks to you, notwithstanding past help,” and his bloodshot eyes flashed fire upon the trembling and shrivelled form before him.

“You fool, I will give you all you want, if you are only patient,” cried Jasper, grasping his hand, whilst he internally cursed the boorish obstinacy of his dangerous ally. “It’s bad doing business on an empty stomach.”

“And worse to pass such nasty jokes, I can tell you, on a poor devil in such a pickle,” growled Rudd, retreating more into the room; “however, you may ring up the cold meat,” and he sat down in the dark whilst his host rang the bell.

In five minutes’ time the latter came and set him at liberty. “Get your fill first, and then we’ll have business afterwards,” said Jasper, coaxingly. “Do you choose beef?”

“Anything. I could eat a dead horse, I’m so famished,” growled Rudd, falling upon the pile of meat the other took care to cram his plate with.

“The dolt ! does he not see that that will allow me to drive the harder bargain with him ? ” was Jasper Vernon’s inward soliloquy.

“You don’t look to thrive with your new way of life, Rudd,” he said, with a smile.

“Thrive the devil,” and the wretch washed down the first plateful with a tankard of ale. “I’ll be found dead in a ditch, some of these fine mornings, and a coroner’s inquest will bring in a verdict of starvation over my bones.”

“Would to God you were so now ! ” thought Vernon, with an uneasy shiver, as he remembered what a dangerous confidante this reckless villain was for a man in his position, with the Clarendon estates almost within his grasp ; and he felt as if he could have given all his own wealth to have secured such a consummation at that moment,—
“I could sit on that jury myself, I think.”

“It’s much more to my taste, I can tell you, to sit here before a good blazing fire like that,” the man cried, as he threw down his knife and fork at last, and drew his chair nearer his host’s,

“than trudging on through mire and slush, perhaps for miles in the dark, with the wet rags that cover one’s nakedness clinging to one’s skin, as if they meant to grow to it, and perhaps a hungry belly into the bargain,—such work tells on the strongest of us, and as for a poor delicate brat like that of yours—”

Jasper Vernon sat up in his chair, and fixed his keen cold eyes upon his scarred swarthy features with sudden interest. “Ay! ay! a brat like that, I’ll be sworn,” he cried, “wouldn’t take it very kindly, Rudd.”

“One would have thought it would have been the death of him in a week, and yet how bravely he held out, poor little wretch, with his blistered feet and aching legs, never daring to utter a word of complaint. I tell you what, Mr. Vernon,” and he struck the table a blow with his huge fist, that made every thing on it dance again with the force of it, “I could almost make away with myself some times when I think of all I’ve made that poor thing suffer.”

“You’re a maudlin idiot, Rudd,” retorted Vernon, angrily interrupting him, “and as for the brat you waste so much sympathy over, he was the most pestilential little devil I ever came across.”

“What a precious hypocrite he must be then !” added the other, fixing one of his hard keen glances on his companion ; “why every body he came across but myself, pitied him.”

“Where is he now ?” demanded Jasper, anxious to change the topic. “You surely hav’n’t been fool enough to bring him up here, to run the risk of detection.”

“He’s snug enough I can promise you that,” retorted Rudd, surlily ; “although for the matter of that, I could bring him into this room in a couple of minutes at farthest.—But put on your hat and cloak and follow me.”

“Where ?”

“You will see presently,—why what does this mean ?” and the villain surveyed his companion with supreme contempt from head to foot, as the

latter hesitated to comply with his request.

“You surely are not afraid, Mr. Vernon?”

“What guarantee have I that I can comply safely with your demand, Rudd?” inquired Jasper.

“Please yourself,” retorted Rudd, striding towards the door, “I can easily carry the brat to Dalton.”

“Stay, stay, I will accompany you in one moment,” cried Jasper, eagerly, “my cloak is in the passage,” and he disappeared. The next moment he returned, properly equipped, having taken the precaution to conceal a small pistol about his person; and desiring Rudd to lead the way, and observe caution, the well-matched pair struck across the lawn, and presently emerged upon a secluded lane which led out into a valley, thickly wooded, and which was at all times rather shunned by the inhabitants of the neighbouring village, from the fact, that a mill which stood on the narrow brawling stream that flowed through it, had several years

before been the scene of a horrid and revolting murder.

The mill had been abandoned immediately after this appalling tragedy, and was now in a very dilapidated state, and from its gloomy position in the midst of black dense woods, had become the resort of poachers and ruffians of the neighbourhood, who certainly contributed their full share of guilt to sustain the unenviable notoriety it had acquired.

Jasper remembered, as he strode after Rudd, who walked moodily in front, every little incident of that terrible morning, with a distinctness that astonished even himself. The young girl lying on the floor, her long black hair dabbled with the blood that had oozed out of a wound in her neck, her pale ghastly face, fixed eye and livid lips,—the old father terrible in the grief of a strong untutored mind, sitting bolt upright in his chair, watching with tearless eye, and compressed lip, the surgeon vainly attempting to call back the vital spark—and the mother

mopping and moaning in the chimney-nook, more terrible in her horror-struck insanity, than the dead corpse itself,—how it all came up like some frightful picture before him at that moment !

“ Bayles has a jolly fire on at any rate,” said Rudd, looking up as he caught a glimpse of the firelight through a loop-hole in the wall.—“ Take care how you step, sir, for a great many of the steps are broken away,” and he presently began to clamber up the steep ascent, Jasper following him as well as he could, until they paused together upon what had once been the floor of the mill.

Grasping his companion’s hand, Rudd led him over this in the dark, and shoving back a door, introduced him into a smaller room, in which the fire they had seen on the outside was burning bravely.

Seated on a huge block of wood, Black Dick was busily superintending the preparation for supper which was cooking on the fire, in the

shape of a good fat hare, smothered in onions and potatoes. In the far corner of the room, lay something dark on a quantity of straw, and Rudd, snatching the lantern from the rickety table, motioned his companion to follow him, and crept up noiselessly towards it.

Herbert was lying with his face turned upwards, one arm pillowing the uneasy head,—the black hair, once so beautiful and glossy, fell in a tangled heap over the perfectly colourless brow. The face was so thin and emaciated, that even Jasper—hard and cruel as he was—started and turned away from it.

Could it be that the death he saw stamped on that young brow, had at length wrung his flinty heart? Ah! no,—even at that moment he was counting out in his own mind, how much he would give the villain beside him, to complete his deed of cruelty and shame.

“He cannot live long, I think,” he said carelessly, as he turned away, and went up to the fire again, “another month such as you describe him

to have undergone, and he would never trouble either you or me more."

"But we must be well paid for our trouble," said Rudd, stoutly; "it's harder work killing any one in that way by far, than putting a knife quietly into them, and doing the trick in a moment. A couple of fifties would be none too much for the job."

"They shall be yours, provided you take care I am not troubled with the brat again," said Jasper, after a pause, taking out his purse, and counting the notes which he placed in Rudd's hands.

"When it is all over, send me word by a trusty hand," said he significantly. "Now guide me down the mill again."

He disappeared, accompanied by Rudd, and Black Dick began to busy himself once more with the supper.

"A very good night's work, Dick, my pal," cried Rudd, a few minutes after, springing into the room. "Why we may live in clover for

months, now. What was that?" he added, turning pale, as the report of a pistol was heard apparently just beneath the mill.

"Some one poaching, probably," suggested his associate, whose head was running more upon the money Rudd held in his hand, than upon either pistol shots or poachers.

"It can't be,—no poacher would be out in the woods to-night. Get a torch and let us go and see."

"And leave the supper, to starve! You may if you like, but I won't;" and Bayles with real selfishness began to demolish the hare, by splitting it up the back in two equal portions.

"If the supper had not been piping hot upon the table, as you say," added Rudd, rolling a log towards it to serve for a seat, "I would go and see, for I suspect some accident has happened to that rascal; however, if he carries pistols about with him, it sarves him right."

"Certainly; shall we wake up the brat?"

"For what?"

“Poor devil, he will be so hungry,” said Bayles, commiseratingly.

“Oh! let him eat up the scraps in the morning,—they are quite good enough for him,” said Rudd, with a savage chuckle.

CHAPTER X.

IN descending the hill after leaving Rudd, Jasper Vernon accidentally stumbled and fell on that side on which he had concealed the pistol we have already mentioned, and which going off in consequence, wounded him very badly in the groin.

At first, the agony he suffered from the accident totally deprived him of the power of moving. But by degrees, a feeling of numbness succeeded, which, although it alarmed him much more, gave him courage at least to attempt to crawl along on his knees through the wood, towards his own house. He was so faint with the loss of blood as well, that it was three hours at least, before he

effected this, so that midnight had arrived by the time he reached home.

His miserable old housekeeper and hungry valet were still astir, and were in fact both sitting up in a state of no small terror and bewilderment in the parlour of the former, earnestly speculating on the reason that could keep a person of such regular habits as their master from home at such untimely hours. The footman had brought up word from the inn, that Lady Susan Clarendon was dead, and that their master had left her some time before, and had then been sent to bed—the two old creatures determining to sit up alone to await his return.

Suddenly a hasty, yet feeble tug at the bell of the outer door was heard, and the pair exchanged glances.

“That be master, surely, James,” said the old woman, pcevishly; “and yet it be not his ring, neither.”

“It be so very feeble; and yet it must,” quoth the old man: “suppose we go see”—and suiting

the action to the word, the miserable pair got to their feet, the old woman carrying the candle, and her companion a rusty rapier as a protection against an attack. They crept along the doleful passage like a couple of miserable ghosts, condemned to return to the scene of their earthly career as an expiation for their crimes.

“Ask through the keyhole, who be there, James,” whispered the old woman, whose teeth began to chatter with fright. “It may not be master, after all.”

“Who is there?” demanded the shrill, cracked voice of the old valet, who could not hold his weapon steady through trepidation. “Is that you, master?”

“Yes! yes! for God’s sake let me in, for I am badly wounded,” was the reply. “You old fools! what are you afraid of, I should like to know?”

“The house be so lonely when only Margery and I are up,” said the old valet, as Jasper reeled in upon them. “Oh dear, what is the matter.”

“Matter enough,” growled Jasper, sinking down into a chair; “here, Madge, you old ass! run up into my dressing-room and get an old shirt, to use for bandages;—does the old idiot hear?” he added, stamping his foot, on perceiving that she did not attempt to move.

“Dost hear, Madge?” cried the old valet, shaking her by the arm. “Master wants a bandage, old woman!”

“And call Richard, ass, at the same time, and tell him to ride down for Dr. Mead, as quickly as possible,” added her master, as the old woman prepared to obey. “Now, James, help me into the dining-room.”

“Had we not better get you into your bedroom, sir?” inquired the old man in a kinder tone than he usually spoke in. “You will not be so good to move when the wound gets stiff.”

“Perhaps I had,” said Jasper, who felt himself fast sinking into a kind of stupor. “Here! your arm;” and he struggled to his feet.

He nearly fainted with pain and exhaustion

before he reached his room ; and when he did so, and sank upon a chair, so deadly a faintness came over him, and the change it wrought in him was so apparent, that the old valet thought he was really gone.

“ Oh, if Dr. Mead would only come,” whimpered the old man, who was almost helpless through age. “ Shall I undress you, sir ? ”

“ Not until Dr. Mead comes,” whispered Jasper, feebly. “ Bid Margery send me some of her waters—some aniseed, or anything she has by her.”

“ A little brandy, mayhap, would be better,” suggested the old servant, with an air of bewilderment.

Jasper Vernon closed his eyes, and Nixon, fearing that he was really growing insensible, flew to the buffet where he knew his master kept his liquors, and pouring out some brandy in a tumbler, brought it back and placed it to his lips.

Jasper swallowed a little, and rallied suf-

ciently to inquire whether the groom had been despatched for the doctor, and being answered in the affirmative, closed his eyes and endeavoured to await patiently the latter's arrival. With all his stoicism, however, a casual twitching of the lip betrayed the agony he endured, and it was with a mighty sigh of relief that he at last heard, from the noise beneath, that the man had returned, probably in company with the object of his search.

“Go down and describe to him how it happened,” he said, suddenly looking up; “tell him I was going through the plantations alone, and, accidentally falling, the pistol went off, and wounded me in the groin,” and with an imperious wave of the hand he motioned the man from the room.

The moments that elapsed before the surgeon was ushered into his presence seemed hours to a man suffering such dreadful agony as he endured. Twice he was on the point of calling out, and both times with a great effort he re-

strained himself, and endeavoured to await patiently the doctor's arrival.

Up he came at last, sleek, rosy, and jovial as ever was mortal man, with a plump rotundity of person that did one good to behold.

"I am pained to hear that you have met with an accident, Mr. Vernon," was his opening salutation, smiling blandly on the distorted visage of his patient.

"And a very bad one, too, doctor," was the sardonic answer. "Had Nixon not better undress me before you probe the wound?"

"It would be better, certainly. Do you feel much pain?"

"I did at first; but that soon went off, and I suppose I fainted with the loss of blood; because, when I came to myself again, beyond a terrible numbness about the seat of the wound, and a general weakness, I could scarcely have known that I had met with such an accident."

"A very bad sign," *thought* Dr. Mead. He looked grave for a moment, a great feat with him,

and then said, " You had better allow Nixon and Richard to carry you, Mr. Vernon, as any exertion on your part will only increase the danger. Be very gentle, my good fellows." And the two men, not without some resistance on the part of the patient, transferred Jasper Vernon to his bedroom, and placed him on a couch.

The task of undressing him was much more difficult than they had anticipated ; for the blood had coagulated and soaked so into the clothes, that every movement gave Jasper the most intense agony. He shuddered and felt very sick indeed when he caught a casual glimpse of the wound, all jagged and bloody, and would have fainted, had not Dr. Mead made him swallow a very powerful cordial.

The greatest suffering he had to go through yet, however, was when the doctor began to search for the ball. How the first sharp pang thrilled through every nerve, sending the feverish blood from the face, and making the house ring again with the shrieks he could not stifle ! The old

valet and the groom felt sick even, and turned away their heads, whilst the decrepid housckeeper shook in every limb, and began to mumble the prayers she had forgotten since her youth.

He was so feeble by the time the ball had been extracted and the wound tightly bandaged up, that they lifted him as easily as if he had been a child into the bed, and the doctor, desiring the valet not to leave him during the night, and to give him some cooling drink whenever he needed it, took his leave.

A night of terrible anguish followed to the wretched man. How often, during its lonely watches, did a terrible spectre sit at his bedside, torturing his delirium with its dusky terrors! How often did the figure of that poor child whom he had so lately seen lying, lank, hungry, and emaciated, on his miserable bed, scare away his uneasy slumbers! How many a good resolve did he make, that with returning strength he would atone for all!—if, alas, he was ever permitted to rise from that bed again!

Rudd and his companions in the mean time had left the old ruined mill, and were now trudging wearily on towards London; Bayles and Rudd in front, Herbert, poor little fellow, lagging foot-sore and heart-broken in the rear.

All the ruddy bloom that had once again begun to mantle in his cheeks during the few fleeting, happy days he had spent under the good doctor's roof, was, alas, fled, and instead, a sickly pallor had overspread his meek and patient countenance.

He had grown tall, too, for his age, and looked like a plant that had shot up beyond its strength to catch the light and warmth of the sun. Herbert was in fact outgrowing himself.

Exposure to every alternation of weather, brutal treatment, and miserable food, had already sown the seeds of a terrible complaint in his system. The hectic flush, the sudden heats and cold, icy sweats, the ravenous appetite at one moment, and at the next an absolute loathing of food, had already developed themselves with

startling plainness. And yet the poor child fancied that it was but a passing faintness that came over him so often, and under the influence of which he scarcely had strength to drag himself along after the two ruffians in whose power he was. Alas! the happiest news he now could have heard would have been to be told that the hand of death was upon him. What a happy release it would be to the poor little fellow, more miserable in his degradation than the beasts of the field, to have lain down to sleep with the curses of Rudd ringing in his ears, and to have waked up among the angels!

“Keep a sharp eye upon the younker, Bayles, or he’ll give us the slip,” quoth Rudd, who had lighted his pipe, and was smoking away quite contentedly; “he has played me that trick once or twice already.”

“What a little hypocrite he must be, then!” rejoined Black Dick, who was marching along with his hands in his pockets, shivering with cold. “To look at his face now, Rudd, one couldn’t

believe such a thing possible. Where the dickens do you intend us to get a snack ? ”

“ There’s a snug place just a bit lower down the road,” said Rudd, lazily ; “ a mile or so farther, maybe.”

“ Not more than a mile, I hope,” growled Black Dick, casting an anxious glance up to the lowering sky. “ Holloa ! young-un, ~~are~~ you peckish ? ”

“ Rather, sir,” said Herbert, quickening his pace to a run, to keep up with the rapid strides of the two men.

“ It will only be sarving the young hang-gallows right to make him fast till dinner-time, for running away with master Hemp,” quoth Rudd, with one of his terrible frowns.

“ No, no ; he shan’t be punished in that way, poor fellow,” rejoined Bayles, with a sudden touch of compassion, as he noticed Herbert’s hungry look. “ I would go without my own breakfast, hungry as I am, rather than that.”

“ Thank you, sir,” said Herbert, innocently.

The villain laughed and took hold of the boy's hand.

"Come, sheer off there, will you," growled Rudd, noticing the action, which brought back to his mind poor Hemp's kindness to Herbert. "I don't like any one to interfere with the boy but myself."

"It was only a bit of kindness," retorted Bayles, sullenly, but without releasing Herbert's hand. "The poor little wretch can scarcely drag himself along, alone."

"Let go the hand, Bayles!" said the ruffian, hoarsely.

Bayles felt the little trembling hand struggling to disengage itself, and touched, why, he scarcely knew, he let go the hand, and interposed between Rudd and his victim.

"You shall not strike the boy, Rudd," he said, firmly. "If you must fight with any one, attack me."

Rudd thrust him aside with a surly laugh, and ordered Herbert to come to him.

“ Not if you intend to beat him, Rudd. As sure as you’re standing there, he shall not stir unless you give me your word for that ! ” cried Bayles, passionately. “ Confound you ! my blood boils whenever I see you raise a finger against him. ”

“ Who is going to ill use him, idiot ? Not I for one, at any rate, ” growled Rudd, who had now got Herbert by the hand. “ I only want to keep my property to myself—that’s all. ”

“ I won’t see him abused ; remember that, ” said Bayles, in a deep, stern voice. “ There’s something in his meek, gentle look that, villain and devil as I am, goes to my heart. I had a boy once, and he was just as gentle and as good, and by the memory of my dead child I swear you shan’t tyrannise over that boy ! ”

Rudd sneered and frowned, but did not speak. With all his daring, he feared Bayles, whom he felt to be his match ; and so he walked on in silence, still grasping Herbert by the hand. The

other man followed close upon them, with his arms folded over his chest, his nostrils distended, his face flushed with excitement, and his solitary eye fixed intently upon Herbert, whom he had now after a fashion taken under his protection.

“There’s the house,” said Rudd, at length, breaking silence, as a turn in the road brought a small public house into view. “It’s a poor place, eh?”

“Poor enough for us that have money in our pockets,” rejoined Bayles, with a gruff laugh. “A week ago it would have been high enough for us, I fancy.”

Rudd growled something in reply which did not reach his companion. Herbert felt his hand grasped still more tightly at the moment, and Rudd striding out still more vigorously, in a very short time was standing within the door.

“Can you get us some breakfast, mother?” he asked, in his usual gruff way, addressing the pale, drooping woman who came forward to receive his orders.

“ We haven’t much in the house, sir : but if you can wait a few minutes I can soon make you comfortable,” she said, glancing pityingly at Herbert.

“ What can you give us to be going on with ? any cold meat in the house ? ” he asked, looking suspiciously round.

“ We have a ham shank.”

“ Nothing better ! put it on the table here, before the fire, with a loaf of bread and a pot of ale, and get us the best breakfast you can, and as soon as possible.”

And apparently convinced that his orders would be obeyed as promptly as possible, Rudd threw himself on the settle before the fire, and began to watch with lazy interest the preparations for the morning meal.

Bayles in the meanwhile had carried Herbert to the horse-trough outside to perform his ablutions, and now came in looking certainly much cleaner and fresher for his performance, and took his seat on the other side of the chimney-nook, Herbert

crouching at his side. The sickly-looking woman had already covered the little table with a cloth, and having furnished it with plates and knives, placed the meat and bread on the table.

Rudd cut a couple of immense slices of the ham, which he placed between two hunches of bread, and began to devour them with the voracity of a wolf. Bayles contented himself with a more moderate slice, half of which he slipped into Herbert's hand, unknown to Rudd, and ate the remainder himself without much apparent relish.

Whilst thus engaged, the door opened, and a stout, buxom woman entered the kitchen. Rudd was lying with his back turned towards her, watching the broiling of some collops. He did not look up, although his head and even some portion of his countenance was visible to her, as she stood in the shadow of the doorway. She was, as we have said, stout, plump, and rosy, with a benevolent expression lurking about her smiling lips and light grey eyes that attracted your attention the moment you beheld her. Her dress was

of the homeliest description, but singularly clean, the whole betraying her station to be a very humble, though probably, not a struggling one after all.

For a moment she seemed irresolute how to act, for a host of varying sensations flitted across her honest kindly face, and then with one glance at Herbert, which though fleeting and momentary, was full of significance, she glided across the sanded floor and disappeared into the room beyond.

Of all the three beings who had been in the room when she entered it, Herbert was the only one who had noticed her, and a thousand wild hopes, and a thousand still wilder terrors were stirring at his heart, as he watched her steal so silently across the floor, and disappear as we have described into the private sanctum of their hostess. Aid was once more at hand, in the person of honest Natty Gyde, or how could Natty's wife, gentle, loving, motherly Meg be there? Meg it really was, for they were within a couple of miles

of Natty's forge, and Meg was out on a business trip to dispose of her eggs and butter, the pale, drooping landlady being one of her humble customers.

Meg had seen him! Meg had recognised him; and by her peculiar smile had said as audibly as words could have done, that he should ere long be rescued from the fangs of his merciless tyrant; the thought was almost too much for him, and lucky was it that Rudd at that moment yelled out, "Come mother, are those collops not done yet, that you keep us waiting so long for breakfast?"

The woman put her pale, thin face in at the door, "I will have all ready directly, sir," she said feebly.

Herbert caught a glimpse of Meg's bright, eager face through the opening before it closed, and this was food enough for him to meditate upon through the whole of the meal that followed, alternated as it was by Rudd's brutality and coarseness.

"The lad and you had better lie snug here, to-day, to rest abitt," he said to Bayles, at the con-

clusion of the meal. "I want to see some one hereabout, and may as well slip over this morning. I suppose you will have no objection to another snooze after the bare quarters you had last night."

"If you dare leave the boy with me," said Bayles, surlily.

"Yes! you are answerable for him, mind. Here, mother, show these two upstairs to bed, and let them lie down till I come back. I shan't be long," he added, turning to Bayles; and, humming a tune, he took up his stick and went out.

Herbert breathed freely after he had gone, for he did not dread Bayles at all, in comparison with Rudd, but sate in his own warm nook, watching intently the door by which he now expected Meg to come out. Bayles had fallen into a doze on the settle immediately upon Rudd's departure, so that the boy had the coast clear to himself, and so fixing himself securely in his corner, he turned his face towards that door, his heart beating rapidly or failing him altogether whenever a casual foot-

step in the adjoining room led him to hope that she was coming.

She did not come, however. Half an hour—an hour elapsed. The boy grew sick with terror, lest she should have gone without leaving any message for him, and he could scarcely restrain his tears ; still, Bayles dozed on, and still Herbert watched.

By degrees, the warmth and stillness of the place had their usual effect upon his worn and exhausted frame. He began to close his eyes and feel drowsy, and a pleasant sensation of ease spread itself over his aching frame. He still heard the crickets chirping on the hearth, and the lazy ticking of the old clock in the far corner, and strove still to keep his gaze fixed upon that door as earnestly as if his very being hung upon the issue.

And still Bayles slept on, and the boy, for a time, forgot all his troubles in blessed unconsciousness.

Suddenly he woke up with a start, to find the

pale, melancholy face of the woman of the house bending over him. He glanced hurriedly over to Bayles, and now saw that worthy lying at full stretch upon the settle, snoring most lustily, and giving audible token that he was in the land of dreams.

“Has she gone?” he whispered, catching the thin, feeble hand that hung over his head,—“dear, dear Meg?”

“Hush—or he will hear you!” said the poor, pale thing, in a quick, still voice. “She has!”

“And left me here!” sobbed the boy.

At that moment, Bayles stirred, and half looked up. The woman shrank back into the deeper shadow of the corner, and laid her hand significantly upon the boy’s head; Herbert never stirred, and Bayles was presently fast asleep again.

“You must not be afraid,” she whispered, the next moment; “Natty will move heaven and earth, to rescue you;” and before he could ask more, she had glided away, and Herbert, the next moment, heard her bustling about amongst the

plates and knives, in the little lean-to, in which half her existence was passed.

She had told enough, however, to keep him quiet and happy through the rest of the morning, and he could now go to sleep with a light heart, in the blessed consciousness that friends, able and willing enough to aid him, were at work to frustrate the baneful influence of the terrible Rudd, although those friends were only honest Natty and his simple Meg.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH her bonnet falling back upon her shoulders, her hair blowing wildly about her plump, rosy face, now bursting into a flood of tears, and at the next moment laughing with hysterical passionateness, sobbing, and panting with her race through the mud and mire,—now floundering deep in some treacherous quagmire, and, anon, rattling gaily over a heap of stones that happened to lie in her way, quite as unconscious of the one mishap as of the other,—Meg held on her way, right gaily, until the forge came in view, with its thin wreath of blue smoke curling fantastically up among the leafless trees.

Then she paused for a moment, and pulled her bonnet back to its old accustomed place again, smoothed her hair back from her brows, and adjusted her dress as neatly as she could, all the while walking rapidly on, endeavouring to calm down her spirits to their usual sober tenor. When within twenty yards of the old hut, the door opened, and Nan, a little taller, a little plumper, and a little rosier than of old, came out, and seeing Meg, uttered a shrill cry of delight.

“Here is mother, back again, father, without her basket, for a wonder!” she cried, to some one in the forge; and, with a swoop, like a night-hawk, Herbert’s old companion flew into her mother’s arms.

Natty came out from his den, with his blue flannel sleeves rolled up nearly to his shoulders, and his leathern apron - blowing about his legs.

“Why, wife, what is the matter now?” he cried, anxiously, as Meg came up to him, still holding Nan in her arms; “thou’s riddled wi’

mud from top to toe, thy hair is all blown six ways, for Sundays, about thy face, and—why, wife!” and Natty’s voice rose high in terror, “thou’s actually been crying; surely, no one has had the daring to ill use Gyde’s wife!”

“Oh, Natty!” sobbed Meg, fairly bursting into tears, as the gigantic smith held her at arm’s length; “oh, Natty!”

“Why, what the dickens is the matter with the poor little woman?” growled her husband, giving her a smacking kiss; “has any one been ill-using thee, wife?”

“No, no, Natty!”

“It’s better for somebody, then,” rejoined her husband, holding her in one arm with grotesque tenderness; “if they had, azooks, I’d not have left a whole bone in their skin!”

“But, Natty, no one has dared to lay finger on me!” said Meg, proudly; “who would—and I had you to the fore? but I’m only half wild with joy and delight,—I’m out of my senses, Natty!”

“I really think you must be clean, stark mad,

Meg !” respodned the smith, looking at her with a puzzled air ; “ where’s the basket ? ”

“ All safe, at Mother Dolly’s ! ” said Meg, flopping down upon the bench in front of the forge. “ What do you think I saw, not half-an-hour ago, there ? ”

“ How can I tell ? ” retorted Natty, scratching his head, and laughing gaily ; “ not t’ould woman, sure-ly ? ”

“ Oh, no, Natty, I saw—I saw your brother ! ” cried Meg, speaking very low, and very distinctly.

“ Rudd ! ” growled Natty, lifting himself up with a sudden start, and towering above the little shrinking woman, like some gigantic cyclops, with his swart, dusky visage, flashing eyes, and swelling muscles ; “ you didn’t sce Rudd, wife ? ”

“ I did, Natty !—it almost gave me a turn, but I didn’t cry out, or he would have seen me ; and Natty, he had that poor, dear boy with him still. Oh, Natty—Natty ! ” and the true, loving-hearted woman rose up, and threw herself upon his breast, sobbing out her words with startling

earnestness. "Oh, Natty, as you hope for mercy, save that poor boy from that terrible man,—for Nan's sake,—for mine, Natty!" and she sank down again, all in a heap, at his feet, insensible.

"Has the fiend dared to cross my path again?" muttered the smith, lifting Meg's unconscious form upon the bench, with a sort of rough tenderness, that made him look still stronger and more athletic than he was. "In everything—in a mother's love—a father's wealth before me! No, Meg, I wronged thee,—good, true-hearted, loving wife,—I wronged thee!" and his rough lip quivered as it pressed her cold, pale forehead; "thou, at any rate, he could not buy," and with an unconscious smile he placed her back against the wall of his humble forge, and began to pull down his sleeves.

"Tell your mother, Nan," he said, in a low, hoarse voice, addressing his daughter, "when she recovers, that I am gone to Mother Dolly's, and that she must go home, and remain there until I return. If Rudd should come—but, he dare

not!—he dare not!” he added, as a frown distorted his usually placid features, and again stooping down, he kissed his wife’s lips tenderly.

Meg shivered, sighed, and opened her eyes.

“Are you not gone, yet, Natty?” she asked, feebly.

“In a moment, wife; as soon as you are better, go home, and stay there until I come,” he reiterated with emphasis. “Nan can wait here for me until I come back. You are not afraid to stay by yourself, my lass?”

Nan laughed merrily at such an idea, and Natty patting her head approvingly, strode towards the door. When he reached it he turned round again, for Meg had tottered to her feet, and, with her hands pressed convulsively on her breast, and her little, plump, tidy figure swaying backwards and forwards with the feelings that stirred within her breast, exclaimed in a low, earnest voice “Oh, Natty! do not let that poor boy remain longer in Rudd’s fearful clutches.”

“Trust to me, wife,” said Gyde, quietly; “if

we only once get him into our keeping again, all the Rudds in the world shouldn't get him into their possession," and the next moment he was gone.

Rudd in the meantime had gained his brother's house, which he approached with great caution, lest any of the inmates should happen to be at home, which, however, was not usual with them during the day. Satisfied, from the silence of the place, that he had nothing to fear on this head, he advanced boldly to the open door, and entered the clean-swept and tidy kitchen. It was empty, and for a moment the man paused, irresolute whether to proceed or not. It was evident that he had expected to see some one in this apartment, who, contrary to habit, was on this occasion absent. With a low whistle, however, he passed on, and, crossing a passage, came to a room, the door of which standing ajar, showed him a small apartment, neatly furnished, the fire burning in the grate, and the darkened light showing it to be occupied by an invalid.

Again Rudd paused and listened ; but all around the house was as silent as the grave, except the cluck cluck of Meg's pea-fowl and the mellow cooing of the pigeons on the thatch, and, with a trembling hand, he pushed open the door and entered.

" You are home soon, girl," said the shrill keen voice of Natty's mother, who sat propped up with pillows on the bed : " it seems scarcely an hour since you were gone ;" and her sightless eyes were turned unconsciously upon the savage figure of her son.

Rudd did not speak. He was too busily engaged in noting the ravages a few short months had made in the only being he had ever loved, to hear her. The last six months had done the work of ages ; and the miserable wretch who now lay before him seemed but the wreck of the once proud and imperious woman who called him son. Her grizzled hair had escaped from the band that enclosed it, and now fell over her gaunt, yellow, bony face, from which all colour had fled, leaving

it of a corpse-like hue; her lips were livid and shrivelled; and her long talons clutched convulsively the coverlid as she repeated in a whining tone, "you are soon home again, Meg. Does the woman hear? You are far too soon home again."

"Mother!" said a deep, hoarse voice.

The wretched old woman rose up in bed at this adjuration, and a far different expression for a moment flitted across her countenance as she exclaimed, "Who calls?"

"Mother!" again exclaimed that stern, low voice.

"That was not Dalton's voice. Edward Dalton, is it possible you have once more returned to the scene of your earthly crimes?"

"No, mother!" cried Rudd, flinging himself on his knees at the side of the bed: "it is your son who calls."

She passed her hands across his rough, deeply furrowed face with trembling terror, for that voice had awakened memories that had long slumbered in her soul. A ray of intelligence lit up the half

idiotic expression age had already stamped upon her withered countenance, and again Rudd murmured, "Mother!"

Faintly as the words were breathed, she heard them, and again lifting herself up in bed, she exclaimed in her shrill, feeble voice, "How mirk the night is! Pull aside the curtain, and let a little leet into the chaumer. Natty! Meg! where are ye, that ye dinnot hear my son calling me?"

"Mother, cease thy wretched drivelling," interposed Rudd, fretted out of all patience by the miserable old creature's fancies. "I am your son—your Rudd."

"My son!" shrieked the old wretch, clutching the bed-clothes in her feeble grasp; "I have no son but Natty."

"You had, mother. When Dalton took you from your husband's house, you carried with you the unborn offspring of your guilty passion."

"Ah, I was young and giddy then, my dearie," sobbed his auditor. "I knew not how fallen, and

vile, and wretched I could become, and that my whole life would be the penalty of my sin. And why do you come to disturb the last moments of a sinful, miserable wretch like me by such tales as these?" she demanded fiercely.

"I am going on a long journey, mother," responded the man, sternly, "and have come to say good-bye."

"We are all going that road," said the wretched creature incoherently. "Young and old, bad and good, we are all journeying away to our account. Begone, then, witness of my shame, and leave me to die in peace, if I can."

Her hand was resting on his head as she spoke. Rudd heard her muttering and crooning in a low tone to herself after she had finished. Suddenly the sound was hushed, and in its place a faint groan was audible in the silence of the room; the hand fell off from the shaggy cushion on which it had rested, as the senseless frame sank back upon its pillows; the eye glazed; the mouth writhed convulsively, and then settled down into the hor-

rible distortion of death. Rudd lifted himself up, as a vague terror, new and strange to him, shot through his heart, and felt that he was standing in the presence of the dead.

CHAPTER XII.

HERBERT passed a day of terrible uncasiness as hope or fear alternated in his breast, at one moment anticipating every chance footstep that approached the house was that of Meg or Natty, and at the next fearful that the door should open and disclose the figure of his old persecutor Rudd. Neither however came, and gradually the time stole on until noon was passed, and the poor landlady laid the cloth for dinner. He could not help noticing as she did so, that her gaze was fixed at times mournfully upon himself, and this was more than sufficient to deprive him of his slender appetite.

“Are you ill, boy?” demanded Bayles, with

surly kindness, as the boy hung his head and declined the greasy mess he placed before him, and for a moment a kindly look was visible on the black, deeply lined visage; "if so, say the word at once, and you shall go to bed."

Herbert's head was aching terribly, and there was a feverish bloom on his wasted cheeks that attracted even the attention of a man so habitually careless of any one but himself, as this worthy individual; yet the boy durst not venture to acknowledge himself to be ill, lest he should destroy his hope of assistance from Meg, but endeavoured to eat his dinner. The first mouthful, however, was more than sufficient to satisfy him, and with an involuntary shudder he shoved the plate away, and supporting his head with his hands endeavoured to bear patiently the aching pangs that were beginning to torture his frame.

A slow fire seemed to be consuming his very vitals—his head felt in a blaze—his eyes were dull and glazed—his breast throbbed again as he pressed his hands against it—a horrible despair seized

upon him at this juncture; the fever from which he had scarcely yet escaped, aggravated by the exposure to wet and cold, and increased by the terror and grief of mind his capture by Rudd and Bayles had occasioned, was upon the boy once more.

With every hour he became worse—Bayles had fallen asleep on the settle after dinner, so that for a time he escaped notice; but at length the man awoke and looked up, and not immediately discovering Herbert, who was lying in a dark corner, as far removed from the fire as possible, sprang up with an oath as he imagined that the boy had taken that opportunity to escape.

“ Oh, you are there, are you,” he exclaimed, as Herbert, terrified by his vehemence, attempted to jump to his feet. “ Stand up ! ”

Herbert attempted to do so, and sank down again all in a heap at his feet.

“ What is the matter—are you ill, or only shamming ? ” demanded Bayles, who was only kind to the boy through opposition to Rudd, and who, now

that the latter was out of the way, could be savage and brutal enough. “Hist! do you hear me?”

“I am afraid I am ill, sir,” faltered the boy, who could scarcely articulate the words.

“Here, my good woman,” cried the man, making the house ring again with the hoarse tones of his voice; and the landlady appeared.

“Carry this boy to bed, and give him something warm to drink, and give him plenty of hap to keep the heat in him—I can see he’s in a high fever, poor fellow!” and he turned over on the settle and began to snore again.

The melancholy drudge motioned to Herbert, and then for the first time aware of his helplessness, took him up in her arms and carried him up stairs into a meanly furnished room, where there was a small bed without curtains.

“Poor little fellow, how hot his skin is!” thought she, as Herbert lay helpless as an infant on her lap as she undressed him. “Dear, dear! how I wish Meg would come back again, or send Natty here—

this poor boy can never go forward with those cut-throats to get his death so soon."

She paused for a moment to listen, but no sound of approaching footsteps was audible, and sighing once more she completed her operations by dressing him in an old nightgown, and taking him up in her arms laid him tenderly in the bed and covered him up with the clothes.

"I am very ill," whispered the boy with his feeble voice, motioning her to stoop down to catch what he said, "so don't let them take me away from dear Meg."

"I won't! I won't!" sobbed the poor meek thing, eyeing him with her great mournful eyes; "and now, go to sleep, do."

Herbert smiled, and whispered something which she could not catch, and then the woman stole out of the room and crept down stairs, lest Bayles should awake and come to see what she was about; and Herbert, closing his eyes, attempted to fall asleep.

An hour after, when she stole upon tiptoe, he

was still awake. First she heard him muttering and laughing to himself; something in the tones of his voice, or in the laugh itself, which was a very wild and unnatural one, induced her to go to his bedside, and there was Herbert lying, his hands tightly clasping his head, stretched across the bed, the clothes thrown off him, and huddled in a heap upon the floor.

“What is the reason of this?” she demanded, angrily, startled for a moment out of her usual hopeless indifference. “Did I not cover you nicely up, to keep you warm?”

The boy gibbered, and made mouths at her, as she advanced towards him, and then clasped his head still more tightly.

“Poor thing, he’s quite beside himself,” said she, in a commiserating tone. “What shall I do if Meg does not come soon?”

She sate down to think, out of reach of the boy, for, somehow, she dreaded those wild, brilliant eyes, and distorted features. “These men, I can see, are nothing better than two

thieves, if not worse;" and she involuntarily shuddered, and then, as a new thought struck her, started to her feet, crept noiselessly to the door, and locked it. She was secure now, for the house was old and very substantially built, and the door would have defied twenty men to have forced it.

A feeling of security succeeded, which was, alas, of short duration. True, the boy and herself were safe, but that was but poor comfort for a poor creature like herself, who had to live by her own exertions. She had left everything exposed to the tender mercies of her two robber-guests, and she had but little doubt that they would take signal vengeance on her little wealth in the lower rooms, if she once ventured to oppose their will with respect to the poor insensible little fellow lying before her.

For a moment, her prudential ways got the better of her terror and sympathy, and she was half way across the room, to unlock the door once more, when the sight of Herbert moaning

and sobbing, and singing, by turns, recalled her better thoughts, and, with a deep sigh, she sate down near the window, determined to await patiently whatever might befall her.

The window unfortunately did not command a view of the road immediately in front of the house, so that she had not even the miserable consolation of watching for the approaching aid ; one end of the house jutted out so far, as entirely to shut out the prospect,—the only object visible being the sort of paved yard fronting the house itself.

It was fast growing dark, and still nothing stirred, either within or without the house. Rudd had not yet returned, and Bayles evidently still slept, or he would, long ere this, have been up stairs, to see how Herbert fared. This respite, however, could not, she was convinced, be of long duration ; and having now, by a great effort, subdued her terror, she quietly and sensibly proceeded to make such arrangements as lay in her power, to increase the security of her retreat.

With this end in view, she, by help of a heavy chest of drawers, barricaded the door, although she knew from past experience, that it was more than sufficient of itself to resist an ordinary assault; and, taking one of the sheets from the bed, hung it up in front of the window. She had barely done this, before she heard a noise down below, and presently she heard Bayles stumbling up the dark stairs, bawling out as he came, to know where she was.

She pressed her hands over her bosom, as if to still the palpitation of her heart, and remained immovable in her chair. Herbert, fortunately, was laying in a fit of exhaustion in the bed, and did not move, when the ruffian thundered upon the door, accompanying his salute by a volley of threats and curses, which made her blood run cold to hear.

Then she heard him stumble along into the adjoining attic, which was soon searched, and then return again to batter against the door, with no better effect. She even smiled, as he went grumbling down stairs again, for her courage was

beginning to revive, and then, fearing that the boy might be alarmed by the uproar, she drew off her shoes, and crept into bed beside him, folding him tenderly in her arms, with the hope of lulling him to sleep.

There was now a silence of several minutes, which, however, like the stillness of nature immediately preceding a storm, only foreboded the hurricane that was to follow. A quarter of an hour had scarcely elapsed before she knew by the increased uproar and commotion, that Rudd had returned; and now, trembling with real terror, she drew the boy closer to her, and awaited, with speechless agony, what was to follow.

She had not to remain long in doubt. Up stairs they came, like a leash of baffled sleuth hounds, foaming, cursing, and howling out their threats of vengeance and destruction.

“Open the door, you jade!” cried Rudd, in the low, hissing voice that characterised him when thoroughly roused. “Do you hear?” and

a perfect volley of blows followed the adjuration ;
“open the door, you hag, or I’ll blow it down
about your ears.”

She trembled violently, but did not move. She knew they would probably murder her if she admitted them even now, and she knew as well that the strength of the door itself, barricaded as it was, would be more than a match for all their strength—murmuring for help from God, she once more clasped the boy in her arms, and awaited with sickening terror, the course of events.

Rudd’s voice now rose loud in the unwonted silence that had followed all this uproar,—“We must force the door somehow, Bayles. Is there never a bed-post or a poker to get about the place?”

“There’s a bed in the next room,” rejoined the other, with a surly laugh. “If you will lend a hand, we can manufacture a lever or two out of it, in no time.”

She heard Rudd follow his confederate into

the little attic, and knew the next moment, by the crash that ensued, that they had wrenched away the poles from the bed. They were back again in a moment ; and then, applying their herculean strength to the door, with the assistance of the new weapons they had thus possessed themselves of, attempted to force a passage.

She had involuntarily sat up in bed, as this new and formidable antagonist was brought against her, and for a moment she gave herself up for lost, and a shrill cry unconsciously burst from her as she saw the hinges strain and heave, as thrust followed thrust, in rapid succession. All was, however, in vain ; the house had been built in an epoch when work was made to last, and triumphantly did it defy all their efforts.

“ Let us burn the hag in her den ! ” growled Rudd, loud enough for her to hear, and the next moment they were in the little attic again, to fetch the wreck of the bed and one or two rickety chairs, which was all the furniture it contained.

She listened with breathless terror, expecting that they would pause again, with their spoil at the door, but they did not; they went on, trailing the heavy poles down the narrow stairs, and presently she heard them cursing and laughing on the pavement without. Then she heard a hurried running to and fro between the kitchen and the yard, and, unable to restrain her curiosity, she again crept out of bed, and peeped behind the blind.

A thrave or two of straw was lying in a loose heap immediately beneath the window, on which were placed a few chairs and other light pieces of furniture. She had barely noticed this, when Rudd ran out from the house with a shovel-full of red-hot cinders, which he threw into the midst: the whole was in a blaze in a moment, and with a wild huzza that made her flesh creep, the ruffians dispersed in search of more materials to feed the flames.

One by one, she saw tables and chairs, a rickety old dresser, and a few books, her homely

household goods, cast forth to the devouring element. She was almost too heart-broken to see more, had not a strange indefinable curiosity chained her to her post to watch out the issue of the catastrophe.

The fire was burning low, for everything that was easily removed had been cast into the flame, when by some chance, Bayles espied a long ladder lying in the little yard behind the house.

“This will make a capital blaze!” he cried, staggering beneath the weight of it. “Here, bear-a-hand, you lazy brute! we will make the old lady refurnish her establishment, at any rate.”

Rudd’s face was turned, so that she could mark the workings of his countenance at the moment, and she was sure from the expression she beheld there, that something more than the joy of feeding the fire, called up the look of triumphant hatred she saw depicted in it.

“Bring that hatchet forward, and chop it up!” cried Bayles, gleefully; “it will keep the fire in a blaze for half-an-hour, this will.”

"Hist! be quiet, and wait one moment," said Rudd, in a low voice, glancing up at the window; "we can put that to another purpose, fool!"

"What's got into that brain of yours now, Rudd?" asked Bayles, gazing stupidly at him.

"Here, help me to hoist it up to that window, if it will reach as far," said Rudd, sternly; "we will soon unearth the old fox;" and then with a loud huzza, it rose quivering in the air, paused for a moment, and then sank slowly against the opposite wall, the top rung reaching, alas, just midway across the casement.

She shrieked out in her terror, and sank down on her knees, sickened with fear, for there was no hope for her now. Rudd was half way up the ladder already, and once more strong in her despair, she rose up as a bright thought flashed through her brain. She saw a dense, dark mass of human beings advancing up the road, although they were still a quarter of a mile or so distant, and the sight of aid so near at hand, and which was yet too far away to be effectual, nerved her hands.

She waited until his head was on a level with the window, and then flinging it open, she hurled the ladder from the wall, and was only conscious of a loud yell, followed by a dull heavy fall, as she sank down all insensible by the chair near which she had stood to perform the feat.

When she came to herself the room was full of light, and crowded with people. Meg was supporting her in her arms, whilst an old gentleman with silvery hair, and a complexion like winter berries, was holding some pungent aromatic to her nostrils.

“ Dear heart alive, do look up, and say you’re better,” cried Meg’s cheery voice, as she opened her eyes. “ We all thought you were dead when we first got into the room. Now do look up, Alice dear ! ” and the honest little woman fairly went off into strong hysterics.

The poor creature shuddered, and shrank away from the strange crowd that seemed to swim around her. “ Where am I ? ” she asked, in a feeble tone, looking in a bewildered way around her.

“ Why, where should you be, but in your own

house, Alice woman?" cried Meg, who had rallied wonderfully quick, and was now hugging her, might and main. "Where should you be, but in your own house, with Natty and Meg, and all these gentlemen, to be sure?"

"Oh! what a frightful dream I have had, then," cried the poor creature, sinking back all in tears, in Meg's arms. "I dreamt some one was attacking the house, Meg, and that they had burned all my poor bit of furniture, and that——"

"It was no dream, Alice woman," retorted Nell, quickly, "but all over true, my brave heart."

"You are a noble, daring-hearted woman!" said a majestic-looking gentleman she had not yet seen. "No man could have behaved more nobly, and I shall consider it my duty to reward you hereafter for it."

Was she in a dream still, or could some wonderful good fortune have happened, that a poor timid creature like her could be thus addressed? Presently some one cried out, "Where is Gyde?"

“ Down below, guarding the prisoner,” responded a rough, deep voice.

“ Is the man badly hurt ? ” demanded the same voice.

“ Very bad indeed : he has never spoken since they lifted him up, but Gyde says he thinks his back must be broken.”

“ Go down, some of you, and help Gyde. Here! clear the room of all but Mrs. Gyde and this good woman : ” and she saw them all disappear with the exception of Meg, the white-haired old gentleman, a very handsome young man, who had all this while sat at the head of the bed, apparently absorbed in watching the boy, and the stately and imposing looking man who had promised her his protection.

The old gentleman and the latter stood for several minutes in the centre of the floor, talking earnestly in some foreign language ; and in the meanwhile Meg stole up to her side, and whispered cheerily, “ Don’t be afeard, Alice woman, for they’re all real gentlefolks, and very kind they are. The

old gentleman do say you shall be a rich woman for life, so don't fret about the bit duds those cut-throats burned, for it will all be made up to you."

"And the man, dear Meg?" she asked, clasping Meg's fat chubby hand in her own. "Is he alive?—Is he much hurt?"

"Terrible!" answered Meg, with a shudder. "Oh! what a turn it gave me when we got up and saw him lying all in a heap, without either shape or life a'most in him.—But what has become of the other one?"

"Why, are there not two?" cried Alice, clasping her hands.

Meg shook her head. "We only found one when we got here."

"Then the other has run away, for there were two.—And who are these gentlemen, and what do they want here?"

"Hush! some wonderful great people, surcly. Yon handsome youth sitting by the bed is something akin, I fancy, to that poor little fellow there; at least we guess so from what they said when

they first came to our house, and got me to lead them here."

"And the boy?" demanded Alice, fixing her large, mournful eyes upon her.

"Is richer than any of them; but whist! here they come!" and Meg drew herself up, and dropped a curtsy, as the old gentleman's companion paused before them.

He regarded them both for several minutes in silence, running his gaze from the one to the other alternately. His gaze rested longest on Alice, and it was to her he spoke at last.

"You have done a great service, my good woman, to one who never forgets either a benefit or an injury. Tell my friend here," pointing to his grey-haired companion, "when you are more sufficiently yourself, what are your wishes, and he will religiously perform them. In the meantime accept this as an earnest of what is to follow," and he held out a purse, through the silken meshes of which shone the gleam of gold.

"If you please, sir, Meg told me first how shamefully those wretches had treated the dear

boy, and Meg, therefore, deserves your bounty more than I do," she cried, timidly. " Give it to Meg, if you please, sir."

" But I do not please," he cried, with a frown that made her tremble—" I give you this money as an earnest of future gratitude on my part, and as such, you must accept it in spite of all the Megs in the world ;" and with a rough gesture, he thrust it into her hand.

" As for you, mistress Meg, as you are a contumacious little baggage, that is neither good to drive or lead, I shall treat with my faithful ally, master Natty, about you, and shall only demand a kiss in token of future friendship ;" and with a peculiar smile, that puzzled poor Alice more than all the rest, he snatched a kiss from the pouting lips of the blacksmith's plump little wife, before she had well made up her mind whether to refuse it or not.

He then went down stairs, leaving his grey-headed old friend to rejoin the young man at the boy's side.

" Do you think he will live ?" demanded the

latter in a low, earnest voice, as soon as he saw who it was.

“The issues of life and death are in the hands of God,” was the solemn rejoinder—“Go down below now, Mr. Cecil, and leave Herbert to my care.”

Cecil stooped down and kissed the hot, throbbing brow, and pressing the good old doctor’s hand, left the room in silence, without noticing the two women.

“Alice, woman! had we not better go down stairs, and see if we can be of any service,” cried Meg, after a pause; “they may be wanting something to eat, and the ways of the house is strange to every one but yourself;” and then seeing that she was all in a tremble still, she took her by the arm and led her from the room.

Everything below was in the greatest confusion, for the two ruffians had dragged everything they could lift out to the front to feed the fire; one huge table, however, had defied all their efforts, and on this, the crushed and mutilated body of

the miserable Rudd now lay to all appearance dead.

Meg stole up to Natty's side, and gazed with sad composure on the awful spectacle before her. The face was upturned, disclosing one or two frightful gashes over the temples, and had already assumed the purple tinge, which in cases of that nature is the forerunner of death, whilst the clothes were saturated with blood.

"An hour ago," said Dalton, with mournful sternness, "how daring was the heart that beat within that breast, and how powerful for evil was that frame which now lies senseless as the clod of the valley! His sins be on his own head!" and bowing his head, the half-brother left the little group, and passed out into the open air.

An hour after, he sent a message up to Doctor Rivers, to say that his carriage was at the door, and that if he thought Herbert could be removed with safety, it would be better to effect that at once. Doctor Rivers, however, would not endanger the safety of his patient by running the

risk of a removal, and so Dalton set off alone, Cecil obstinately refusing to be separated from Herbert, by whose side he had once more taken up his watch.

The boy was now, however, in a raging fever, and all through that terrible and sleepless night, age and youth hung over his lowly pillows, scarcely daring to breathe even to themselves the grief and despair that brooded, like some hideous nightmare, on their hearts—Very terrible was it to them both to hearken to the wild ravings which the mortal agony upon him, wrung from one so gentle, so tender, and so meek as poor Herbert; and still more terrible was it to look into each others' eyes, and behold the reflection of the terror and despair that preyed upon the soul of both.

CHAPTER XIII.

DALTON did not sleep that night. By midnight he was in London, to secure a hurried interview with his solicitor, who had to be called out of bed for the purpose; and, by the first grey dawn of morning, his silent form once more stood by the young boy's bed.

"He is no worse," was all the reply he could wring from the tireless and excellent old man; "be of good heart, my dear friend! God surely has not restored him to us merely to deprive us of the blessing again."

Dalton sighed, and stole from the room. Descending the stairs, he entered the kitchen, his eye immediately resting on the table we have already mentioned as that on which Rudd was

laid, when he was brought into the house. Dalton shuddered as he beheld a white cloth spread over it, beneath which something massy and bulky was deposited; and, on removing one end, the face of the wretched being, grisly and repulsive even in death, was upturned to his own. He covered it up hastily again, and was about to leave the room, when Cecil, wan with his night vigils, stole in from a hurried walk.

“What do you think of Herbert?” he asked, with forced calmness.

“He is decidedly not worse than when I left, last night,” was the prompt reply. “My dear Cecil, do not give way to despair. With God’s good blessing, I trust, Herbert will still be spared to us.”

Cecil sighed, and advanced towards the stairs.

“When did *he* die?” asked Dalton, pointing to the table where the body was lying.

“During the night, I believe.”

“Did he ever recover consciousness?”

“I believe not: there was no one with him when he died.”

“Not even the woman of the house?”

“No: she was frightened; and our friend Gyde and his wife took her to their own house for the night. Some one was saying that they found his mother, I believe it was, lying dead in bed when they got there, and that she was this villain’s mother as well.”

“Good heavens!” ejaculated Dalton, as a suspicion of the truth rushed into his mind, “Gyde and Rudd brothers!”

“What is the matter?” asked Cecil, noticing his agitation. “Do you know these people—this villain?”

“Go up to Doctor Rivers, my dear Cecil, until my return. I will not be above an hour at most,” said Dalton, who was evidently deeply moved; and the next moment he was fifty yards from the house.

“It is—it must be—as I have all along suspected,” was his inward soliloquy, as he strode forward in the direction of the smith’s house; “this Gyde is the son of the miserable and guilty

woman whom my no less guilty sire tempted from her rectitude and virtue. Gyde, Gyde," he muttered, as if striving to recall the name to his memory, "Gyde it surely was, or I'm a drivelling fool. And this man's father shot mine, and expiated his crime, if crime it were, on the scaffold. I will unravel this tangled web of misery and crime, in which the innocent and the guilty suffer alike," and he again strode rapidly forward.

Within a quarter of an hour he came in sight of Natty's house, and, had not his mind been already pre-occupied, he could not have failed to note what a beautiful picture the quaint old house, all ivied and garlanded with roses, the little croft in front, with its velvet carpet of turf, and the dark, solemn woods, stretching away on all sides, formed to delight the eye of the lover of nature.

He lifted the latch and entered, instinctively doffing his hat, for there was something in the unwonted solemnity of Natty and Meg which exacted his sympathy in spite of himself. Natty

had not been at the forge that day, as was evident by the suit of decent yet homely mourning which he wore, and which he only assumed on very solemn occasions like the present.

The smith had risen, and was now standing midway on the floor. Dalton paused a moment to admire the wide girth of chest, the fine stern head, placed so firmly and strongly on the shoulders, and the long and sinewy limbs, which were disclosed to their fullest advantage by the unwonted dress which Natty wore. Gyde, on his part, paid a silent homage to the dignified grace and commanding features of his visitor, who now hastened to break the silence by saying—

“I trust you will not consider me intrusive, friend, by coming to see you at the present time, when affliction, I understand, has visited your dwelling.”

“You are welcome, honoured sir,” was Natty’s simple response. “As you say, affliction has indeed come amongst us, and that, too, at a time when we were but ill prepared for it.”

“I learned, on returning to the place where I

parted with you yesterday, on reaching there this morning, that that miserable being has at last ended his career of guilt."

Natty's voice trembled slightly as he responded, "May God forgive him! With your permission, sir, I will take steps to have an inquest held over the body, and then decently inter it at my own expense."

"So," thought Dalton, "my suspicions are well founded, after all. Now for the old woman!" and then, turning his dark eye on his simple ally, he said, kindly, "I understand you have just lost your mother, Mr. Gyde."

"We have, please your honour," said Meg, dropping a curtsey: "she went off very sudden at last, sir."

"Go and look after Nan, wife," said the smith, significantly; and, as Meg bustled away at her husband's bidding, he went on, with a dash of sternness in his manner: "my mother, sir, was a peculiar woman, and one quite out of the common way, as one might say, for she had been brought

up with the quality, and had learned their ways over much, perhaps, for her own peace."

"You raise my curiosity ; and if it is not intruding upon your grief, my honest friend, I should like to see her," said Dalton.

Natty's face darkened over in a moment, and Dalton almost started, so sudden was the transformation he beheld ; and he almost repented his curiosity when he noted the distrust and suspicion Natty's manner instantly betrayed.

"I am sorry, sir, I cannot comply with your wish. We are only simple people, and, as such, have scarcely a right to refuse to humour the whims of our betters. My poor mother is gone now, but her scarcely cold remains shall not be exposed to the gaze of vulgar curiosity."

It was Dalton's turn now to look angry and distrustful, yet he did neither ; he extended his hand, exclaiming, "Excuse my rudeness, well-intentioned though it was, friend. You have taught me a lesson which I shall not readily forget ;" and he rose to go.

Natty accompanied him to the door, neither proffering apology nor seeming to think one needed. He listened with a sullen gloom on his swarth features as Dalton described the situation of Herbert, and his own future intentions with regard to all who had aided in his discovery, and would scarcely promise to come along in the evening to assist Dalton in some business in which his presence, the other said, was absolutely necessary.

Strange to say, Dalton turned his steps from the smith's humble dwelling with a more hearty sympathy for its bold and untutored possessor than he had almost ever experienced for any one in the whole course of his stirring and eventful career. Natty's rude manner struck a chord which had long lain dormant in his soul; he had at last talked face to face with a man in the lowest walks of life whose poverty neither made him reckless nor fawning, and who bore himself towards his fellow-men with the same dignity and stern self-respect as if he had been placed by fortune in the proudest possible position.

With Herbert, in the meanwhile, life and death battled for victory. Young, ingenuous, and rich, he had been the sport of a malicious fortune, who now, fairly baffled in all else, still seemed to hold suspended over his young head the direst of all—before whom king and kaiser, beggar and serf, must bow—the grim destroyer, death.

All day long the good old doctor and Cecil watched and prayed beside his unconscious pillow ; all day long the fever held him in its strong embrace. At one time he would be in a lethargy, to all appearance at the point of death ; immediately after, he would start up in bed, shrieking out in his terror for Cecil or his dear papa, to rescue him from Jasper Vernon and the villain Rudd ; and then he would repeat, in a tone that made your blood run cold, the frightful story of his sufferings from the day he left his guardian's house, dwelling more particularly on his journey down to Dover, and which seemed, perhaps, from its more utter misery, to have taken the strongest hold upon his young mind ; whilst the good old doctor failed not to remark that the boy's re-

sidence with himself seemed entirely blotted out of his memory.

At Dalton's entreaty Cecil consented to resign his place to him at Herbert's side that night, and the two friends accordingly took their places together, towards midnight, to watch by the bed of suffering—perchance of death.

Everything around them conspired to increase the sombre feelings that weighed equally upon their spirits. The house was old and lonely, and the room they occupied was but indifferently furnished, as you may well conceive. The night was stormy, for a cold chill blast moaned and sighed through the dismal woods that surrounded it on all sides. The solitary light, that burned lugubriously upon the drawers, shed a lurid light upon the boy, who was in one of his quiet humours now, and the two pale, hushed men, who watched beside him; the rest of the room lay in unbroken gloom.

Dalton sighed and shivered as he glanced from Herbert to his grey-headed friend, and then

caught the sough of the wind without. Then he fell into a strange train of thought: this scene, so dark, so dreary, so disheartening, recalled his own early manhood; for he had not been happy when young. Few men of a generous and aspiring nature perhaps are, at the epoch of which we write — that strange, unreal age between eighteen and twenty-five, when a wild indefinable yearning for something above and beyond us seizes upon the mind; something intangible and mystical which our dreams paint with the rainbow tints of youth, and which, alas! soon fades and disappears beneath the ruthless hand of time.

Insensibly he began to give his thoughts utterance, in a low, subdued tone, his head sunk upon his breast, and with a troubled light gleaming in his mournful eyes.

“How terrible is this warfare between right and might—this grinding of the weak by the strong. It makes me tremble and shrink within myself as I think of all this boy has suffered; of all I suffered myself in my youth.”

“Did you suffer likewise in your youth?” said the calm, sweet voice of the watcher beside him.

“I did! I endured the keenest agony.” He sighed and closed his eyes, as if the mental survey was too much for him. Suddenly he opened them again, and fixed his humid glances upon the boy. Herbert was lying in that position which betokens the most perfect prostration of physical strength; when the arms thrown wide apart, the head sinks on the breast without finding relief. The boy’s face was perfectly devoid of all expression, as if nature was now thoroughly exhausted; his complexion was perfectly colourless, with the exception of two deep purple circles beneath the eyes, which gave a still more ghastly look to the open eyes.

“Do you still cling to the idea of his living?” said Dalton, pointing with his finger to the poor little fellow. “Look at him; his strength is worn out; he cannot contend longer with his foe.”

“He has reached the turning point of his dis-

order," said the doctor, in a low voice, as he rose and laid his hand gently upon the face, the breast, and the limbs of his patient: "he is quite cool—he may recover."

Dalton sat looking at him for several minutes in silence. The doctor's grey hairs and placid air perhaps encouraged him to unbosom himself to him as he did.

"Are you a good listener?" he asked quietly.

"I was once," was the calm reply.

"Are you in a mood to hear a strange tale; strange only that it is true; for stranger we can not well imagine to have happened."

"If you have patience to narrate it; I prefer listening to talking, at times."

"A rare gift, my friend—listen."

"Thirty years ago, in a neighbouring county, there lived a man of great wealth, who had an only son. The father was a man of strange compounds; for he was at once a miser and a spendthrift; one who lavished untold gold upon his own pleasures, and who yet grudged that that

wealth should be shared, in any degree, by those around him.—Does the story interest you?”

“Very much—go on.”

Dalton shifted his position, so that his features were thrown into deep shadow, and resumed:—
“This man was cursed with an unbridled lust which nothing could satisfy; and being rich and powerful, many a poor creature owed to him her early shame, and untimely death. Amongst the rest the wife of one of his keepers attracted his admiration, and with the bold, never-sleeping ingenuity which marked his character, he resolved, at all hazards, that she should be his. I should have told you he was a widower, and that his son had arrived at manhood. The keeper was known only as an honest, uncultured fellow, of great personal strength, whom his master had made a sort of favourite of, and it was when taking shelter in his company, in the latter’s cottage, that he first beheld the fatal object of his passion. The woman, I have been told, was very beautiful; of that commanding beauty which we are ac-

customed to realize as belonging to the haughty Egyptian, who wooed Antony to destruction; and in her case, ambition and pride were the real serpents that lurked under such a kindred form. He planned a meeting, to which she was faithful, and although she affected to treat his protestations of love with scorn, he still dared to dream of conquest, and in the end, succeeded. She had had one son, whom you saw to-day; another, the offspring of her guilty love, lies stark and stiff in the room below. The husband, who had deep passions under his heavy exterior, and who loved his worthless wife with an ardour few possess, was roused to phrenzy by his wrongs. But I anticipate; I have already mentioned, I believe, that this rich man had a son. The latter had, when on an excursion in the north of England, met with an accident, sufficiently serious to warrant his being carried to the house of a lady in the vicinity. Here he was nursed by one of the gentlest and purest beings that God ever made. His recovery was slow and tedious, and by the

time he was again able to crawl about, gratitude in his breast had ripened into love.

“The young girl was too innocent and guileless to dream of the danger she ran in thus accompanying in his walks, a being so gifted with the graces of a good person, and an ardent temperament. Poor thing! she never thought that those pleasant walks at noon, that delicious intercourse of two kindred hearts beneath the silent night, when the moon and the stars were the only witnesses to his vows of undying love, could have brought of peril or pain to her after life. She thought only of the present with its dreams of ecstatic happiness, and in that dream she was content.

“The lovers, however, for he too loved, ardently, devotedly, truly, were at length aroused from their dream of joy by a peremptory mandate from his father to return home. He knew how imperious was that will before which even his proud spirit bent, and so with many a tear and many a vow they parted, he promising with his

last word to write very often, and to see her again ere long.

“He had not been at home many weeks before a letter, full of grief and terror, reached him. Her mother, who had sheltered her, (like some fair tree the tender sapling beneath it,) from infancy, was dead, and with her, had died the modest income that had sufficed for both.”

Dalton paused and moved uneasily in his seat. He sighed more than once very heavily, and went on.—“What do you think a man, such as I describe, would do under such circumstances?”

“He would marry her,” said the old doctor, in a husky voice.

His auditor’s eye lighted up for a moment,—
“He did! He travelled night and day from his father’s place, until he reached the now sad and lonely house in which all that he now held dear on earth, dwelt in mournful foreboding and anticipations of the future. He pleaded his suit with all the eloquence of love, painted the lonely sadness of her situation with a lover’s pathos, and

had the satisfaction of ere long pressing to his heart, as his own, the purest and tenderest being that ever breathed.

“ And now came the real difficulties of the young pair’s position. His father, he knew, would never permit him to carry his young bride home to the house, which by right was her’s, neither would he have tainted her unsullied honour by allowing her to associate with the bold bad woman, who now usurped the rights of a lawful mistress there. The father had installed the keeper’s wife at the head of his establishment, soon after she had given birth to a second son.”

“ And her unhappy husband?”

“ Had disappeared, none knew whither. The allowance his father made him was barely sufficient for his own modest wants, and had it not been for the noble generosity of a friend, who loved him as a brother, his wife’s necessities might have made an outbreak between him and his worthy parent, unavoidable. Time wore on, not without its pains, and sorrows, and its joys.

The young wife's confinement drew near, and his friend with a rare and delicate generosity placed his own house at their disposal, removing all his servants, with the exception of two, whom he could trust, lest they should carry the news to his friend's father.

“The lady gave birth to a son, who was tacitly adopted by his friend, and when soon after he, in turn, brought a fair young bride to preside over his hospitable board, she too, with a woman's rare generosity, felt her heart yearn towards the poor little fellow, and never made any distinction between him and her own children, dying, in fact, without divulging the secret.

“The second year since the keeper's disappearance had drawn to a close, when one winter's morning the watchers on going their rounds came upon their lord, lying all stiff and gory in a pool of his own blood at some distance from the house. You can imagine what a wild thrill of horror such a crime sent all through the country, and how close and eager was the inquiry

that followed as to the guilty hand that had struck the death blow. For two days, the keenest officers engaged in the inquiry were at fault, when a milk-maid chancing to pass the deserted cottage of the keeper, happened to peep in, and there beheld sitting upon the deserted hearth, its former possessor. An hour after, when a strong posse of constables armed with bludgeons came to arrest him, they found him in the same position in which she had discovered him, with his hands supporting his head, brooding apparently over his unhappy life. He made no resistance, nay, he rose up and welcomed them with a smile, telling them that life was a burden too heavy for him to bear, and that he trusted he would find rest in the grave. He met his ignominious fate with the same unshaken courage, whilst his guilty wife, deprived of her support by the death of her paramour, went into a distant country, and has been now long forgotten in the district where her guilt was once held in such strong detestation."

“And this is the woman whose son now lies below?” asked the old doctor, breaking the long pause that ensued.

Dalton nodded.

“I have now told you all,” he said mournfully ; “need I add who was the son of that guilty man?”

“Yourself, of course—and am I to understand that the young man who now bears the name of Cecil Clarendon, is not the son of Colonel Clarendon, but of yourself.”

“You may—he is my son,” said the proud father—“The secret has been a bitter and painful one to me in many respects, but there is now no farther necessity for concealment. To-morrow, if the state of poor Herbert permits it, I will break the news to Cecil, and formally acknowledge him as my heir; as Cecil Dalton, he will not be a poorer man than as Cecil Clarendon,”

“And will Herbert be rich?”

“He will if he lives—I really believe he is asleep.”

The doctor crossed over and examined his little patient. Herbert had fallen into a quiet slumber, his thin wasted arm pillowing his flushed cheek. There was something in the placid repose of the attitude, even the smile that at that moment hovered around his lips, that gave his fond old friend courage to hope, and he once more returned to his seat to communicate his prognostications of a happy termination to his stern, yet warm-hearted companion.

And all through the lonely night watches, those two solemn hearted watchers sate silent and sleepless beside the humble pallet where youth and death wrestled for the mastery. Who shall attempt to say how many prayers went up to the eternal throne of God for mercy ! In the solemn hush of night when all the world keeps silence, the spirit insensibly "mounts her zenith with the stars," and holds communion with the loftier intelligence that gave it being, and thus it was with Dalton and his grey-haired friend. Their minds were not cast in the mould which sees nought but

gloom in a sick-bed; they knew that seasons such as these, were sent to purge away the guilt of our fallen nature, and that in the words of the psalmist, "It is better to go into the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting."

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was broad noon when Herbert awoke. The sunlight was dancing through the tattered curtain, and the first glance showed him the well-known form of the good old doctor sitting reading at a little distance.

He attempted to speak, but his words died away in an articulate whisper. He had no better fortune when he essayed to rise. He was so weak, that he could not even raise himself in bed, and tears in spite of himself sprang to his eyes.

“You have been very ill, my dear lad,” said the doctor in a whisper, coming towards him; “nay, even yet you are not out of danger, and therefore I must insist upon your not attempting

to speak. You are in good hands, now, although your bed is of the humblest, as you may see. Can you take anything?"

Herbert made a sign that he was thirsty, and the dear old man himself instantly brought a glass of jelly that felt deliciously cool to the poor boy's burning throat. The looks of affection he gave the doctor whilst he was eating it, and the manner in which he pressed the withered old hand he held in his own, almost made the tender-hearted old man shed'tears himself.

"Now you must try to go to sleep again," said the doctor in his quiet way, as he settled the clothes about him again; and Herbert smiled, as if he was quite eager to obey him. The doctor took his book, and began to read again, and had got through two chapters, when chancing to look up again, he happened to look towards the bed, and discovered Herbert busily engaged in watching him with his great hollow eyes. Doctor Rivers frowned and looked seriously angry, and the boy then closed his eyes, and attempted

to fall asleep; his bewilderment, however, was so great to find himself fairly established under the good old doctor's protection, that he could not do so for a very long time, and long before this the doctor had resumed his book and was fairly launched into his author once more.

Then the boy was dimly conscious of some familiar face, for it was only through the fringed eyelids that he caught a glimpse of it, stealing in and hanging over him, and then he fell asleep with the warm breath fanning his cheek, and dreamed gaily of Cecil.

When he awoke, Meg was bustling noiselessly about the room; but no sooner did he call out her name, in a feeble voice, than the warm-hearted little body trotted up to the bed in spite of Doctor Rivers's threats, and would not be pacified until she had given him a good smacking kiss.

"Shall I not sponge his face with vinegar, please, sir?" she asked, dropping her eternal curtsy; "and may I not bring dear Nan in to see him? Oh dear! how wasted he is; but never

mind, dearie, we will soon be strong and hearty again."

"You may sponge his face, Mrs. Gyde," said the doctor, smiling at her impetuosity, "but as to bringing Nan in, I totally forbid it."

"But only for one minute, sir," pleaded Meg.

"Not for one moment; did you not promise me you would observe my directions in every thing?" cried the doctor, sternly.

Meg dropped her curtsey again, and yielded at once. The vinegar revived Herbert wonderfully, and then he had another jelly, Meg insisting upon feeding him, as his own hand shook so that he could not carry the food to his mouth.

The doctor all this while was standing with his hands clasped behind him, surveying the pair very thoughtfully. He now came forward and said—

"You must go home now, Meg, and tell Nan that her old play-fellow is, I trust, recovering."

Meg smiled, and kissed Herbert, dropped her curtsey to the doctor, and bustled out of the room. The doctor then made his preparations for

the night, wheeling up a great easy chair to the fire, alongside of a little round table covered with green baize on which the lamp, shaded so as to conceal its light from Herbert, was placed. When all this was completed, the room looked quite snug, and then the doctor having settled down to his book, Herbert could indulge in his thick coming fancies without restraint.

He was too feeble to think much yet, for sickness impairs the mind even still more effectually than the body; but he could feel grateful and happy, and these were such new sensations to him that they almost transported him into Elysium. The room soon began to grow dim before his gaze; gradually, the figure of the good old doctor swelled and increased until he grew to a gigantic size, whilst the book he held seemed to dilate until it filled the room of itself, and then Herbert fell asleep.

He had been nearly a week confined to bed, according to his own calculations, and had grown quite strong and cheerful, when one morning he

was awoke by a more than usual commotion in his room, as if some very important personage indeed had arrived. Doctor Rivers had so religiously kept the sick-room closed from every one but Meg, that Herbert's curiosity was more than usually excited, when what was his delight to recognise in the graceful, beautiful, though somewhat pale, young lady that came up to his bedside, poor, dear Eleanor Clarendon.

"Nell! Nell!" he cried, flinging his arms in a transport round her neck, "are you really restored to me? Kiss me! Kiss me!" and he sank down in a swoon on her neck.

When he came to himself again, it was Eleanor's breast on which his head was pillowed. It was Eleanor's hand that held the draught, that sent fresh life into his languid limbs; and it was Eleanor's voice that thrilled his ears with its well-remembered tones of affectionate love.

"Kiss me, Nell, again!" he asked with a happy smile, and then holding her from him, he surveyed her at arm's length: his quick eye detecting in a

moment, the womanly grace and beauty that had displaced her former slightness of figure.

“ And you are still in deep mourning, Nell,” he said, the next moment, with his old sweet smile.

“ Lady Susan Clarendon is dead. I also heard, as I came here, that Mr. Vernon cannot recover the dangerous accident he has met with,” she said, in the calm, sweet voice the sick boy loved to hear so well. “ Oh ! my dear, dear Herbert, what misery we have all suffered on your account.”

“ Don’t talk of that now, dear Nell,” was the quick response. “ I am afraid I have behaved very wickedly, and have only been rightly punished ; but I cannot let you out of my sight for a moment,” he cried, the next moment eagerly, as she made a movement with the intention of taking off her bonnet—“ Can you find a chair anywhere ?” he said, laughing gaily as he glanced round the scantily furnished room. “ Oh ! there is the doctor’s, wheel that and sit down, that I may look at you—that’s a good Nell !”

Eleanor did as she was bid with a ready grace, and the boy leaning on one elbow, looked at her for several minutes without speaking, his really intelligent features working with a convulsive movement, whilst a tear or two stole down his pale, thin cheeks.

“How beautiful you are, Nell!” he said, at length, “so fair, so gentle, so lady-like, and with just that blush-rose tint on your cheeks, that I love so well.”

“You have certainly learned to flatter since we lost sight of you,” said Eleanor, smiling.

The boy sate up in bed, and began to smooth down the glossy black hair that fell with such profusion over Eleanor’s neck. Then he threw himself down amongst his pillows, and shading his eyes with his hands, surveyed her again with a wistful eagerness, that would have puzzled his sister had she happened to see it.

“Are you going to be married, Nell?” he asked, at last, very abruptly.

“Me! my dear Herbert; what put such a

notion into your head?" she said, looking very uneasy; "really I have been so unhappy about you, that I had never any time for such things."

The boy shaded his eyes, and looked at her again with the same strange look. Eleanor's eyes had sought the ground, and her face was of a marble paleness, although the moment before it had worn the delicate blush Herbert liked so well to see. She trembled visibly before him, as he laughed gaily, and repeated the question.

Eleanor again shook her head, and looked steadily at him.

"Give me your hand into mine," said Herbert, at length. "I cannot bear to part with you, Nell."

"I hope we shall never part again," said Eleanor, hopefully.—"Do you know, Herbert, the strange discovery that has been made regarding Cecil?"

"Oh, I have been so mewed up in this abominable den, that I have never heard a word of what is passing in the world without——But what has happened?"

“Mr. Dalton, it seems, declares Cecil is his own son,” said Eleanor, with an effort.

“How false! how preposterous! and does he expect we will believe him?”

“Cecil believes it,” said Eleanor, firmly.

Herbert rose up in bed and let the hand fall he held in his own. He did not speak for several minutes—he was in fact bewildered with the idea Eleanor had presented to his mind. Cecil not his brother! Cecil not a Clarendon! the idea was madness to entertain for a moment. To be a Dalton instead of a Clarendon was to desert the pedigree of Llewellyn and adopt that of Jones or Smith in its stead.

“And you believe it too, Nell?” he said at last, looking up with his keen searching look.

“I do—I have had such undeniable proofs given me this morning of Cecil’s connexion with Mr. Dalton, that I cannot refuse to believe that gentleman’s assertion. I have seen papa’s own statement.”

“And does he say that Cecil is not a Clarendon?” asked the boy, eagerly.

“ His will does, and in it he leaves Mr. Cecil Dalton ten thousand pounds as a token of his affection,” said the girl, quietly, “ and the estates to you.”

“ To me—Delaval ?”

“ Delaval, certainly——”

“ And may I do what I like with it all when I become a man ?”

“ Certainly — If Mr. Vernon dies, our good friend, Cecil’s father, will become your sole guardian.”

Herbert wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and went on with a flushed countenance and thickened voice. “ Then, Nell, my first deed shall be to make you rich—Kiss me, Nell, again.”

Eleanor humoured his fancy, and said with a smile, “ I shall be very rich with my own fortune, and what Lady Susan has left me ; I have much more than I can ever need.”

“ Then if you won’t have it, I know what I will do with it ; I will make Natty and Meg comfortable for life : Nan shall have a handsome

portion, and I will look her out a good husband when she needs one, and——”

“My dear Herbert!” exclaimed his auditor, laughing immoderately, “you surely forget you are still a very young lad on a sick bed, and that many years must elapse, and many events occur, before that time. Your own recovery amongst the rest——”

“I forget nothing,” said the boy, calmly. “From this hour I feel a new life begin within me, and shall endeavour to fulfil it,” and Eleanor felt the pressure of his thin hot hand as he spoke —“Who is this coming up stairs?”

“It will be Dr. Rivers, I think. It is much beyond the time he promised to return at.”

Doctor Rivers it proved to be. Herbert received him with open arms, his whole countenance lighting up as it had done on his sister’s approach.

“You are much better to-day, my boy,” said the good old man with a delighted look. “Miss Eleanor,” patting her cheek, “I shall engage you

as my head nurse for the future, in all dangerous cases——”

“Then I have been in danger, sir,” said Herbert, still holding a hand of each.

“You have, and Almighty God in his great mercy has delivered you from it in a most wonderful manner,” was the reply; “but you are looking so well, I really think I shall let you see a little company to-day in addition to your sister’s. Who would you like——?”

“I should like to see Cecil above all. Then little Nan, if she can come——”

“Who is Nan?” asked Eleanor.

“One of Herbert’s sweethearts,” said the doctor, slily.

“No! no, Nell—Nan was my play-fellow for a very short time,” said Herbert, stoutly.

“Nan is in fact the daughter of the good people to whom we owe the discovery of your brother,” said the doctor, proffering Eleanor an explanation. “Then I shall walk down myself to Mistress Nan and convey her here.”

Herbert's eyes filled with tears, but he did not speak as the excellent old man hurried away to keep his promise. "I shall petition to be allowed to get up to-morrow, I think," he said.

"You must be removed from here as speedily as possible," said his sister, glancing round the miserable room.

"Mean as it is, it is a palace compared to the dens I have slept in for some time past," was the boy's reply. "My misery has taught me a life's long lesson."

Fresh steps were now heard on the stairs, and presently Cecil entered very quietly, for he fancied Herbert must be much worse than he really was. The latter eyed him for a moment with an unconscious look, for the addition of well trimmed whiskers, a firmer carriage, and increased manliness, had quite transformed Cecil from the light handsome youth Herbert had parted with at Delaval. It was only for a moment, however; for, at the first word Cecil uttered, Herbert flung himself on his breast, with

a passionate flood of tears, mingled with kisses, for Herbert was still a boy.

Cecil was really bewildered. He could not understand why Herbert's emotion was so violent as it really was, especially as he knew that Herbert was by this time aware that all relationship between them was now dissolved by the late declaration on the part of Mr. Dalton.

"My dear Herbert, for God's sake be calm!" he said, really fearing at length that Herbert would do himself an injury by giving way to such emotion; "you will kill yourself, my dear lad."

Herbert calmed himself with a mighty effort, and relinquishing his hold, fell back exhausted amongst his pillows—he turned over upon his face, and although no sound escaped him, they could see by the convulsive heaving of his frame that the storm had not yet passed over. Many minutes elapsed without either Eleanor or Cecil venturing to disturb him, and at length he looked up—

“Where are you both?” he said, looking wildly round, for his vision was obscured, so that he could not discern them at first.

“Cecil!”

“I am here, Herbert.”

“Come nearer, nearer,” said the boy, mournfully.

Cecil obeyed until he had approached so near that Herbert could rest his aching head upon his breast—then he took Cecil’s two hands within his own, and said in a low plaintive tone that brought the tears up into his auditor’s eyes—

“Cecil, God knows how dearly I loved you when I thought you were really and truly my brother! I loved you, my Cecil, as few brothers can love, and now to be told—” his voice faltered and a painful pause ensued.

Cecil felt the little hot hand press his own convulsively. The arm that encircled Herbert’s slender frame returned the kindly pressure, and this nerved Herbert to proceed.

“To be told,” continued the sad, weak voice, “that you are not my brother—our brother, I should say, Cis, for Eleanor loved you as dearly as I did. Oh, it is a bitter pang!”

“My dear Herbert.”

“Hush, Cecil,” said the boy, as a new and peculiar expression flitted over his pale, thin face. “They tell me that by your being a Dalton instead of a Clarendon, I shall be very rich, but God knows, Cecil, my brother, that I would barter it all for the right to call you by that old familiar name. Eleanor!”

“Yes, Herbert,” said Eleanor, who had crept away to the window to indulge her tears in silence.

“Come here.”

Eleanor came forward. Herbert was still lying with his head pillowed on Cecil's breast. As soon as he caught sight, however, of her pale, tearful face, he changed his posture, and flinging one arm round her neck, still retained Cecil's grasp with the other hand.

“ You will still love Cecil, Nell, dear?” he asked gently.

“ I will try, Herbert.”

“ And you, Cecil.”

What Cecil's answer was time must show, for at that moment the door very provokingly opened, and Dr. Rivers appeared, leading in his hand the unfairy like form of Mistress Nan, who now looked bashfully pretty in the company of such grand people.

“ Leave the two together for a little time,” whispered the doctor, who had already noticed how flushed and excited Herbert had become, “ she will soon bring him round to his usual quietness again ;” and obeying his commands, Eleanor, and Cecil Dalton stole out of the room.

“ Come here, Nan, and sit beside me,” said Herbert, languidly, after a long pause, during which, Nan had been standing in the very inelegant act of sucking her thumb ; “ I am ill, my dear, and very weak, so that I cannot talk much, but you can talk away as much as you please.”

And thus adjured, the little round robin took the seat at Herbert's head, and began to stare at his thin, wasted face with all the wonder that the two large dreamy eyes could infuse into themselves.

CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning Herbert was pronounced by Dr. Rivers, to be so far recovered as to bear the risk of removal, a permission he heard with the greatest delight, as he was heartily sick of his present quarters. The poor drudge of a landlady was rewarded with a liberality commensurate with the service she had performed; Herbert, especially, begging his kind old friend to advance him the money for this occasion until he had the sanction of Mr. Dalton for it.

The good old Doctor smiled at this first proof of Herbert's appreciation of his altered position.

"I have desired Natty," said he, "to come to us at Dover as soon as we get comfortably settled there. Sophy will require a maid some of these

days, and your little friend Nan will do admirably, I am sure, in that capacity, when she is old enough."

"Thank you, thank you," whispered the boy pressing his hand; "when I am a man, Dr. Rivers ——"

"Pray do not talk of that period of your life," said his old friend, rather gravely, "as when that time arrives I will in all human probability be dead ——"

The tears swelled up to Herbert's eyes at the bare thought of such an affliction, happening even at such a remote period.

"I will never, to my dying day, cease to love you, sir!" he said, with great feeling.

The old man pressed him to his heart, as he said, "I am sure you will not, my dear little fellow:—but here is the chaise with Mr. Cecil Dalton in it."

"Why has Eleanor not come?" demanded Herbert, nodding gaily to Cecil, who looked rather sombre. "Where is Eleanor, Cecil?"

“ She preferred staying at B—— with Mr. and Miss Dennison to await our arrival,” said Cecil, as he made his leisurely descent. “ How do you feel yourself this morning ?”

“ Much better. What a quantity of blankets and pillows you have brought!” cried Herbert, peering into the chaise; “ why, those surely are not for me ?”

“ But they are, though, Master Paleface,” said Cecil, giving him a hug. “ Shall I lift you in ?”

“ Thank you, I think I can achieve that feat myself,” retorted our hero stoutly, and he was snugly ensconced in one corner in a trice. The Doctor and Cecil followed;—the steps were put up, the door banged to, and away they went as merrily as four capital hacks could carry them.

“ What a famous roomy old chaise this is, to be sure!” cried the boy, looking round with a complacent smile from the corner, where he sat as snug as a mouse rolled up in the blankets. “ You would have a rare good sleep, I’ll be bound, Cis, as you came down ?”

“ No, indeed, Herbert, I hadn't,—I was reading all the way.”

“ Oh, those books !” cried Herbert, with a shrug. “ What weary things they are, to be sure ! Mr. Vernon has made me hate books for my lifetime, I'm afraid ——”

“ Father came into my room before I started this morning,” said Cecil, addressing their companion, “ to tell me he had just received a letter, announcing the death of Mr. Vernon.”

“ He has surely died very suddenly,” said the old Doctor.

“ He got a wound from a pistol-shot when out in the woods lately, and the wound, it seems, mortified,” was the reply.

Herbert fell into a brown study after hearing this: Vernon, then, it seems, was dead!—the villain, whose pharisaical cruelty had made him so miserable!—He was too young to feel how awfully sudden was the retribution that had fallen upon that bad, cruel man, but he was not too young to feel a sensation of joy at hearing that he had nothing more to fear from him.

“ I suppose Herbert will have what property he leaves behind him,” said Cecil, in a musing tone.

“ And that, probably, will be very little, if anything,” said the Doctor; “ I should think he literally died a beggar.”

“ Whatever he leaves, if it belongs to me, I will give away !” cried the boy, eagerly. “ I would not sully my hands with any of his ill-gotten gold.”

“ That boy will be a noble fellow some day,” thought the Doctor, as he sate and eyed Herbert’s thin face flushed over with excitement.

“ Probably all you will get from him, Herbert,” retorted Cecil, laughing, “ will be the right of burying him.”

“ I hope your father will afford him a coffin, then,” said the boy, with a haughty curl of his thin lip as he took his kind old friend’s hand. “ Dr. Rivers.”

“ Well, my boy —”

“ When we get home to Sophy, I hope you will get me a tutor; and I have to prefer a

request, that you will choose one whom I can love as well as obey."

"That will be rather a difficult thing to achieve, Herbert," said the old man, with his placid smile.

"I shall never learn anything unless I do," said the boy, resolutely. "And he must teach Sophy, too."

"Latin and Greek, eh?" asked the Doctor, slyly.

"Oh no, nothing but her native English," rejoined Herbert, gravely. "And I should like my pony brought over from Delaval."

"You shall have it. Is there anything else?"

"I intend asking Cecil's papa to give Natty Gyde the forester's place at Delaval, if it is vacant," said the boy, with strange gravity. "Natty has saved my life, Dr. Rivers!"

"He has, Herbert; and both Meg and himself deserve your lasting protection; you may depend upon my begging this favour of you from your guardian. Now be good enough to hold your

tongue during the rest of your ride, or you will be too exhausted to say anything when you get to your journey's end," said the Doctor, with gravity equal to his own.

Fortunately for Herbert's patience the remainder of the journey was not a long one; but before it was over he had fallen into a pleasant doze, from which he was awakened only to feel himself rather roughly shaken by Cecil, followed by an adjuration to look alive.

"You have got so enveloped in blankets that it is impossible to unswathe you here," said Cecil, taking him up in his arms, and lifting him out. "Can you walk as you are?"

Herbert blushed like any girl, especially as two or three dashing looking waiters were bustling about the chaise, and then, with Cecil's aid, he managed to disentangle himself of his wrappers, and, supported by the latter's arm, followed Dr. Rivers up stairs.

A waiter had already flung open the door of the room in which Miss Clarendon and her friends

were awaiting them. Herbert shrunk back on catching a glimpse of so many people, and then, reassured by the pressure of Cecil's hand, he advanced with a faltering step, and gathering courage, went up to Eleanor, who was already advancing to meet them.

An old man, as venerable as Dr. Rivers, with a snowy head, and a complexion fresh as winter-berries, had already grasped his hand; sitting beside him, was a lady, older rather than Eleanor, with the sweetest countenance, he thought, he had ever beheld. These Eleanor introduced as Mr. Dennison and his daughter. There were still two other ladies, one of whom Cecil approached with "Good morning, mother! You see we have brought our poor little wanderer safe back at last."

The lady—she was the elder of the two—rose up and kissed Herbert on both cheeks, and then placed him on the couch beside her. The younger lady had not spoken all this while, although her lively glance had wandered several times over

the thin drooping figure of the poor boy ; she now rose up, and, pouring out a glass of wine, brought it to him with the most graceful movement in the world. At this juncture the door opened, and the tall firm-set figure of Mr. Dalton was added to the group.

Placed by the side of his son, it was curious to note how all the firm, clear-cut, decided lines of that handsome face were reproduced in the more youthful features of the other ; there was the same proud, half-haughty, half-kindly curl of the lip, the same dark eye flashing with its own light, and the graceful carriage of the Greek-shaped head ; but Cecil's voice was his mother's, as well as much of his peculiar train of thought ; and Dr. Rivers, who was a little bit of a physiologist, amused himself for half an hour or more with remarking how admirably, in Cecil, all the gentle and generous traits of Mrs. Dalton's character mingled with the sterner and more commanding attributes of her husband's temperament.

They were a pleasant little party that night

after the candles were brought in, and the curtains shut out the last gleams of the fading daylight. Herbert is lying on his couch, with Eleanor generally seated very near him, for he cannot bear to lose sight of her a moment; Cecil, now leaning over her chair, under pretence of examining the progress of the embroidery she is engaged upon, and now joining in a duet with Camilla, who warbled ceaselessly to please the sick boy's fancies; and Lucy Dennison, carrying on a lively dialogue with Mrs. Dalton, fill up the foreground of the picture. In the recess sit Mr. Dalton and Eric Dennison, engaged in a game of chess, the sternly handsome features of the former contrasting admirably with the mild benignity that beautifies the wintry visage of the old philosopher. Dr. Rivers sits in his own particular corner, partly concealed by the full flowing drapery of a curtain, his keen, quick gaze taking in all at a glance; there is a calm placid smile on his face, for his heart is whispering to him how much of all this heart-happiness springs from himself;

from God, rather, whispers the soul of the good old man ; and, as if the thought had moved him, he rises and approaches Herbert's couch.

Herbert receives him with open arms, and drawing the old man towards him, nestles his head lovingly on his breast.

“ Do you feel stronger, better ? ” asks the good Doctor.

“ Much ! much, my old friend ! ” murmurs his adopted son ; “ and oh, how happy ! ”

He raises his head as he says this, and the Doctor reads in the clear light of his eyes how true are his words.

“ Why so happy, Herbert ? ” asks the old man with a smile.

“ Because I see every one happy around me,” answered the boy ; “ I have had a long talk with Eleanor this afternoon. Don't frown so, dear friend, for I can bear it all with safety—I have received her forgiveness—” and his gaze wandered round the room in search of his sister.

She was standing near the chess-players, appa-

rently absorbed in the progress of the game, but there was a heightened blush on her cheek that certainly owed nothing of its bloom to the fact of Eric Dennison checkmating his antagonist. Standing beside her, was Cecil, with one arm half-thrown around her waist, whilst *his* eyes were fixed upon the beautiful face of his companion;—the boy's eyes wandered from this group back to his companion on the couch.

The old Doctor smiled.

“You were thinking,” said he, in his quiet whisper, “that Cecil and Eleanor cannot forget their old feeling for each other?”

“I was thinking,” said Herbert, frankly, “that they will be married some day or other.”

“And if they do,” continued the Doctor, who often forgot how young his companion was, “will you not like it?”

“I love Cecil dearly!” was all the answer Herbert gave.

At that moment the chess-players gave up the game, and Dalton, rising, noticed Cecil's attitude.

The young man coloured, and let the audacious member fall to his side, whilst the father strode up to the trembling girl, and, taking her two hands into his own, kissed her fair smooth brow.

Speaking gaily and tenderly to her, he led her to the group seated round the fire.

“ Draw in your chairs, my friends, and let us make a happy family party,” he said ; and, seating Eleanor beside him, he motioned his son to take the vacant chair on her other side. “ Come, my old friend,” he added, addressing Eric ; “ wheel that couch this way, and take my wife beside you. Camilla, my love, can you favour us with some pretty ballad, to put a little life into us ?” And Camilla sang that sweetest of all modern compositions, “ The Flowers of the Forest are a’ weed awa’.”

When it was finished tears stood in many eyes, Dalton’s amongst the rest ; and then, as the Doctor, taking out his watch, declared it was time for Herbert to be in bed, the former took the poor

boy's thin weak hand, and bade him good night as lovingly as any woman, and Cecil noted that there was an unwonted gentleness in his voice, and a chastened light in his eye, for all the evening after.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was a terrible commotion at Dr. Rivers' beautiful cottage about a fortnight after this; for the Doctor had written down to desire everything to be in the best possible trim, as Herbert and himself would be coming down instantly, and would bring several visitors with them.

Sophy has been perfectly wild all day, for her dear old papa, as she called him, had been away so long, and the place was so lonely, with only the two or three old servants about it, that the slightest novelty in the world would have delighted her; but that her old playfellow was about to return to live with them, was wonderful tidings indeed, and she almost forgot the addition of the

other guests in her glee at the prospect of once more encountering her old companion.

It was dark night when the two carriages arrived, and so late, that Sophy was on the point of being ordered off to bed, when the noise of the carriage wheels, crunching the fresh-laid gravel, recalled the mandate, and with a delighted scream the little fairy flew down stairs just in time to rush into the arms of her father.

“ This is Herbert, Sophy,” said the old Doctor, dragging her to the tall pale boy, who stood in the centre of the hall; “ do you not know him, my love?”

“ Oh, papa, that is not Herbert!” she cried, impetuously.

“ It is, though, my love ——”

“ Herbert was scarcely taller than myself, and that young gentleman is so tall!” she said, looking in pretty bewilderment at Herbert.

“ Herbert has been ill, my dear,” said the old Doctor, kindly. “ Now, go and send Mrs. Dorothy here to show these ladies to their

rooms." And Sophy shrank away on catching a glimpse of the two or three draped figures that were surrounding her papa.

Half an hour after, when she stole into the drawing-room, they were all grouped about the fire, Herbert occupying the little couch on which he had spent so many hours when he was first brought to the cottage. The opening of the door made him turn round, and then, springing from his seat, he took her in his arms, and carried her to his corner.

"Will you give me a kiss, Sophy?" he said, smiling.

Sophy lifted up her pretty pouting lips, and then, Herbert caressing her gently, they glided, insensibly into their old familiarity; and Sophy's voice soon rose high above the lively chatter of Camilla Dalton.

"That is my sister, Sophy;" whispered Herbert, directing her attention to Eleanor, "whom I expect you will love very much."

"How beautiful!" said the little girl, with

child-like admiration; "I like her far better than the one sitting next her ——"

"Hush, you noisy little saucebox!—that is Miss Camilla Dalton, and the gentleman sitting next her is Mr. Norman Macdonald, who they say is in love with her."

"Ah, I know what that means!" said the child, nodding her head with great gravity; "It means, they are going to be married."

"Not always, Sophy; although in the present case I trust it does; and the next gentleman is Cecil——"

"I like him," said Sophy, eyeing Cecil very earnestly above a minute; "is he in love?"

"I do not know—suppose you ask him," rejoined Herbert, laughing.

"That I will!" cried the wilful little beauty; and, before ever he could prevent her, Sophy had flown across the room, sprang upon Cecil's knee, and put the question in a very loud voice.

There was a general laugh, which was followed by Sophy's being hustled off to bed, notwithstanding

ing all Herbert's entreaties, and that was all Miss Sophy got for her investigations on this occasion.

Poor Sophy! she soon ceased to be Herbert's companion; for the latter had, during the little interval that had elapsed since their last meeting, apparently lived thrice the time of herself. He was now prematurely tall for his age, and the misery he had undergone had given a seriousness to his countenance, that made him appear older still,—so Sophy was kept in the nursery, whilst Herbert and his tutor took their lessons in the Doctor's study, the only intercourse they now enjoyed being when Eleanor or Cecil petitioned for a holiday to accompany them in some pleasant day's ramble in the neighbourhood.

The Doctor's visitors had been gone several days, when one evening, when Herbert and his companion returned to the house from a stroll round the garden, the Doctor met them in the porch with an open letter in his hand:—

“Here is a letter, Herbert,” said the old man, “inviting us all to a wedding.”

“ A wedding !—How delightful !” cried Sophy, clapping her hands.

“ A wedding !” echoed Herbert.

“ A double wedding,” said the Doctor.

“ Two weddings !” echoed Sophy, with her merry laugh. “ Oh, papa, we must go ——”

“ I intend we shall go, Sophy,” said the Doctor, quietly ; “ that is to say, if ——”

“ Oh, papa, do not make any ifs in the matter !” said the child, clambering into his arms.

“ I was only going to add, Sophy, that the ‘ if ’ was connected with your promising to behave well,” added the Doctor, good-humouredly.

“ That I will, papa—and when are we to set out ?”

“ To-morrow. Do you not ask, Herbert, whose wedding we are bidden to ?”

“ I can guess one, at all events,” said Herbert, smiling : “ Eleanor and Cecil, sir ——”

“ You are right, and the other is Mr. Norman Macdonald and Miss Dalton,” added the Doctor.

Sophy slid down out of his arms, and began to dance on the steps of the porch.

“ Where are they going to be married at, sir ? ” inquired Herbert of Dr. Rivers.

“ Mr. Dalton wishes the ceremony to take place at Gatcombe, on Wednesday next ; this is Thursday, so that there is very little time to make our preparations. It seems that Gatcombe has never been inhabited since the death of the late Mr. Dalton, and as the present possessor intends living very much there in future, he has determined to celebrate his taking possession, as he calls it, by the festivities on that occasion. Eleanor, also, encloses a letter for you, which you can read in your own room, and you can then come to join Sophy and myself in the Library.”

Herbert's letter must have been a very long one, judging by the time he was absent for this purpose, and, contrary to Dr. Rivers' expectation, he did not communicate any of its contents to his companions on rejoining them ; he was so grave as well, that even Sophy's liveliest sallies could not win more than a passing smile in return, and, pleading a headache, he retired early and went to bed.

This abstracted mood lasted all through the days that intervened until the Monday morning, when they had to start early, as a pretty long journey was before them. Once in the Doctor's carriage, however, his old gaiety returned with redoubled force, and the Doctor had at length to threaten to banish him to the rumble before he could reduce him to his usual flow of spirits.

"How pleasant it is, riding in your carriage, papa," said Sophy, after they had grown quiet again.

"Very, my love," said the Doctor, abstractedly.

"You will not enjoy the pleasure much longer, Mrs. Sophy," said Herbert, maliciously. "We are very near our journey's end."

"Oh, well, we shall see the brides then!" cried Sophy, gleefully. "I am sure your sister, Herbert, will be the prettiest."

"You are sure of nothing of the kind, malapert! Miss Dalton is considered much handsomer than Eleanor."

"What an untruth!" cried the little beauty,

angrily. "Miss Dalton is very lively and merry, but Miss Eleanor looks so soft and sweet, with those delicate cheeks and large eyes; she is ten times prettier to my mind."

"And so she is to mine, Sophy!" cried Herbert, patting her head approvingly. "How dark it grows!"

"I'm afraid we shan't see the pretty park and the deer as we drive up to the house," said his companion, querulously: "Will it be very dark, Herbert?"

"Not, if there is a moon. Will there be a moon to-night, sir?" he asked, addressing the Doctor.

The Doctor said there would, and that it would probably rise before they reached the outer lodges of Gatcombe. Sophy was delighted at this, and went on chatting merrily until it grew quite dark.

Herbert sate, and listened to her silvery laughter, nearly in silence, for he was almost too happy to speak; he liked, in fact, to sit and listen

to Sophy, for that was one of the pleasures he enjoyed more thoroughly, perhaps, because he scarcely understood whence the pleasure was derived; and the Doctor, too, apparently liked it as well, for he never spoke, although his quiet, peculiar laugh was sometimes, though rarely, audible to his silent companion.

Long before they reached the lodge gates the little girl's head had pillowed itself in sleep on Herbert's knee, and by the time they had entered Gatcombe Park, the moon had risen, and Herbert, letting down the window of the carriage, leaned out and feasted his eyes with the solemn and chastened loveliness of the scenery through which they were slowly passing.

Gatcombe, in sooth, looked peculiarly lovely beneath the mellowing effect of the moonlight. The park-like beauty of the fine old woods, much of which was of natural growth, showed beneath such a light to the greatest advantage, whilst the far-stretching vistas that displayed themselves at every turn, allowed the imagination to run

riot in a realm of its own, quite as enchanting, if more shadowy, than the tangible world around it.

“There is a fawn!” cried the youth, with a sudden start, as a dark animal of some sort bounded across the velvet turf immediately before them, and at the magical words Sophy opened her eyes, and sprang up to the window.

“What a pretty temple!” was her opening exclamation, as the carriage passed an ornamental sheet of water, with a Turkish kiosk in the centre.

Herbert took his little companion on his knee, placing one arm round her slender waist to support her. Another turn of the road brought them within view of the house, all brilliantly lighted up, as if for an illumination; and the sight of the long, double tier of windows, glittering so far into the darkness, looked so grand to poor Sophy’s eyes, that she remained silent until the carriage drew up at the door.

: So many servants in grand liveries of blue and

silver, probably had never before been congregated within its time-honoured walls as our humble travellers encountered in the hall itself: and there, on the steps, waiting to do the honours of his new house, stood Cecil, with a warm grasp of the hand, and a hundred welcomes for each.

“How dare you come so late?” he asked, after all the questions had been asked, as they went all in a row up the grand staircase, all lit with flambeaux in silver sconces, the lurid light of which added inconceivably to the effect of the armour and trophies with which the walls were decorated. “My father and I have been expecting you ever since Saturday.”

“Be thankful we are here even now, Mr. Cecil,” said Dr. Rivers, laughing; “what a household of people you have.”

“Pretty well,” said Cecil, carelessly. “How much Herbert has improved in the little time that has elapsed since we parted!”

“Ah, he has grown stouter, has he?” asked the Doctor, rubbing his hands.

“Very much, indeed,” was Cecil’s rejoinder. “Dawson,” stopping the groom of the chambers, “send a footman to let my father know Dr. Rivers has come;” and then Cecil ushered them into a room, the grandeur of which far transcended all Sophy’s ideas of earthly splendour, and which being quite empty, had evidently been retained purposely for them.

Slipping out the moment after, he presently reappeared, with Eleanor clinging to his arm. She had just that nervous trepidation which sits so charmingly on a young girl on the eve of uttering those solemn vows which are to seal her destiny for ever in this world; and one or two tears fell on Herbert’s forehead as she stooped down and kissed him. Sophy thought she had never seen anything so heavenly.

“Will you take Herbert’s little friend, here, away to change her dress, my love?” said Cecil, familiarly. “I wonder the poor little thing is not fast asleep.”

“I would have apologized for bringing my

little girl," said the good Doctor, as the door closed upon Eleanor and her companion, "but Miss Clarendon's letter was so peremptory on that head, that I did not venture to transgress her commands."

"Eleanor's happiness would have been incomplete without her," said her lover. "You will probably prefer dining here, *tête-à-tête*, this evening, to joining the fashionable mob below, as you must be very much fatigued!" And he rang the bell.

Dalton himself entered the next moment, looking quite the grand signeur in his own home. Even Dr. Rivers thought he had never seen any one with such a noble bearing, or one who did the honours of his house with such easy gracefulness.

How pleasant was the half-hour that followed the delicious dinner, when—the dessert being placed upon the table—the four drew their chairs closer to the fire, and the wit circulated with the wine! The Doctor and Dalton bore the brunt

of the conversation, Cecil only throwing in a word at random; whilst Herbert sate in a corner, and listened to all the gay and brilliant conversation that was flowing around him; the smile that at times illumined his pale, yet handsome features, showing how thoroughly he understood what was so far above his age. Boy, as he was, however, he could not help noticing the footing on which Cecil stood with his father, and which resembled more the affectionate and unconstrained intercourse of two brothers than the mere formal demeanour of father and son.

“ I must leave you now,” said their host, rising with evident reluctance. “ My duties, as host, compel me to do the honours of my own house to all my guests.”

“ If you have no objection,” said the Doctor, rising likewise, “ I would prefer being introduced to your company this evening, instead of deferring it until the morning, as I am not in the least fatigued by my journey.”

“ I shall be most happy to enjoy your society

on these terms, my good old friend!" said Dalton. "It was only from a wish to spare you for one night, that I ventured to propose a different arrangement."

They passed out upon the staircase, which Dr. Rivers had already seen, and from thence entered a gallery hung with some of the finest specimens of the British School, interspersed with sculpture, by Chantrey and Flaxman: a couple of chandeliers, of exquisite design, shed a softened daylight over this shrine of the arts, and Dr. Rivers insensibly lingered for a moment here and there as he passed, to inspect some gem, the possession of which would have made the fortune of a poorer man.

The opening of a door at the farther end wafted in the sounds of music, and our good old friend, the next moment, found himself a spectator at one of the gayest balls imaginable.

"Are these people all your guests?" he asked his host, in a whisper.

"Every one."

"Why, where in the name of wonder do you

stow them all away to sleep?" he asked, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, my dear Doctor, they require very little sleep, I assure you!" said Dalton, with a smile; "they dance nearly all the night, and the gentlemen go out shooting my pheasants in the day, whilst the ladies, I suppose, discuss scandal and the fashions with Camilla."

"They are a very convenient set of guests, then," retorted the Doctor, laughing. "And now, pray, introduce me to your daughter!"

Camilla, at that moment, came towards them, leaning on her lover's arm. She was, if possible, still more piquantly beautiful and sprightly than she had been when first introduced to the reader at Paris: Camilla, in fact, was not one of those natures which become sentimental and nervous on the eve of marriage; the prospect of being the heroine of such an event only sharpened her wit, and on no one did she shower a greater portion of her gaiety and sprightliness than upon the greyheaded old friend of her father.

“ We have been sighing and fretting for you, Dr. Rivers, for this week past,” said she, in her sweet, musical voice, as a rosy blush spread itself over her lovely features.

“ How flattered I am, my dear Miss Dalton, that an old fellow, like myself, should have excited such an interest in so charming a person as yourself,” said the good Doctor, gallantly.

“ We have heard so much, sir, of your goodness to Cecil’s poor little friend, from papa,” said she, as her little fingers beat the time of the tune they were dancing to, on the arm of her companion, who stood as patiently as if he had been married a twelvemonth to this fascinating young lady. “ I can assure you, when papa first joined us here, after leaving you, that your name was on his lips at every word.”

The Doctor smiled, and bowed, and really looked grateful. “ I have brought Herbert with me,” he said.

“ Where is he?” demanded Camilla, fixing her

large liquid eyes full upon him; "his exploits, if I can term them such, have made him quite a hero in my eyes. Norman, let us go in search of Mr. Herbert Clarendon!" And in a moment the dazzling vision had vanished from the Doctor's eyes.

A scarcely less lovely one rose up before him the next moment, as he turned and perceived Dalton coming towards him with a lady hanging on his arm. She was a little beyond the prime of life, but time had mellowed, and not impaired, her noble and womanly beauty, as it does that of some lovely picture.

"This gentleman has earned an enviable claim to your esteem, madam," said Mr. Dalton, placing the Doctor's hand in that of his companion; "he is the protector of Herbert ——"

"My son has already insured an affectionate welcome for Dr. Rivers, by his description of his unaffected benevolence," said Mrs. Dalton, with her sweet smile.

Again the Doctor bowed, and smiled; and

then the whirl of dancers swept past them to the total destruction of the conversation that was about to ensue, and the next moment a general movement to the supper-room carried him away from his host and hostess entirely, and he was glad, and fain to steal away in search of the room in which he had left Herbert and Cecil. On his way he again encountered Camilla and Norman ; she held out her hand, in her old playful way, and said a few common-place words, with such an irresistible air, that the Doctor was fairly enchanted, and could almost have fallen in love with her upon the spot.

We shall not attempt to describe the wedding that took place in due course. Everything was on a scale befitting Mr. Dalton's great wealth. There were oxen roasted whole, and fountains flowing with wine and ale after the most approved fashion ; the tenantry danced in a *marquée* erected for the occasion, whilst the workmen and their wives feasted in the grand old hall, that had never seen such a merry rout for many a long long

year. The brides both behaved charmingly, although Eleanor was generally considered the more lovely of the two, though this perhaps was owing to the simple white dress she wore on the occasion. Cecil and Norman were all ardour and impatience until the breakfast was fairly over. There was a pretty procession from the old hall to the church, which was at no great distance, brides, and all, walking with the clergyman at their head, and twelve of the handsomest girls on Mr. Dalton's estate strewing flowers before them as they went. Sophy thought this the prettiest part of all; and indeed I thought so too, although the beautiful old church, all garlanded with flowers, and filled with people all wearing a white rosette, and a bunch of blush-roses, was a brave sight too.

After the ceremony was fairly over, there was a great struggle to get the first kiss of Mrs. Dalton, junior, and Mrs. Macdonald. Herbert, I believe, was first-hand with the former, but Norman stoutly averred that he saluted his

charming wife first himself; be this as it may, the contest excited a great deal of merriment at the breakfast-table, and served as a good topic of dispute all the day after.

“ We are brothers again now, Herbert!” whispered Cecil, pressing his hand, as they stood together in the vestibule, as Mr. Dalton led his two daughters to their respective travelling-carriages. “ God bless you, my dear lad!” And Cecil sprang in after his wife, and the next minute they were gone.

“ It is all over,” said the Doctor, with a grave smile, as he noticed how solemn was the youth’s countenance. “ The next wedding we shall probably see, Herbert, if we live long enough, will be your own——”

“ With little Sophy, here,” said Mr. Dalton, who overheard the speech, taking the lovely little sprite in his arms: “ Eh, Sophy?”

“ Oh, fie, Mr. Dalton!” she said, pouting her cherry lip; “ Herbert is a great boy, and far too old for poor little Sophy!”

“ But Sophy will grow a great girl, too ! ” said the Doctor, leading her into the house.

Sophy peeped out at the corners of her eyes at Herbert, as she passed him. He was in a brown study, and did not observe her.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was ten or twelve years, at the least, after all this, that two travellers, on horseback, paused on a fine summer's evening on the brow of a steep Shropshire hill, and looked down on the quiet village that lay bathed in the golden sunset beneath. Of the two, one was quite a young man, apparently not more than one or two-and-twenty, tall and active, with a rich dark olive complexion, glowing with health, an eye full of character and animation, and a merry laugh, that broke pleasantly upon the sabbath-like stillness of the scene. He was not stout—for few men of his age are—but there was a rounded grace about his youthful limbs and varying fea-

tures, that seemed to foretell that he would be so at no far distant period of his existence.

His companion was graver, older, more sententious, with not a little phlegm in his character, if his rather solemn smile, his dry-measured voice, and less active carriage, were to be taken into account. He urged his companion to resume their journey, but still the young man lingered, and gazed upon the lovely landscape beneath them, as if it had been familiar to his eyes and he were loth to bid it farewell.

“ We have seen nothing in Italy, or in the Mediterranean, Butler, to compare with that,” said the younger traveller, at length. “ Look at that white cottage, peeping out from its green shrine of woodland, and the mill below it; and that mixture of light and shade the sun throws over all; how my heart beats, and my eyes fill with tears, as I gaze and gaze upon all that reminds me of the past !”

He sighed, and turned away his head, perhaps to hide the emotion he had just confessed to.

“ We shall never arrive at our journey’s end if we loiter in this way, Clarendon,” said his companion, rather pettishly. “ Remember, the sun is setting, and we have some distance to ride yet !”

“ I told them it would be night when we arrived,” was his companion’s careless rejoinder. “ Ride on, if you will, and let me join you at the bottom of the hill.”

“ I greatly prefer taking you with me,” retorted his more phlegmatic companion, with a smile. “ Come ! Come !”

The young man obeyed, and they rode leisurely down the hill, neither apparently caring to continue the conversation. The younger of the two, however, was not of a disposition to remain silent, and it was not long before he began again :—

“ How very much altered we shall find them all !” he said, half sadly, fixing his dark eyes curiously upon the sober lineaments of his friend. “ Our good old friend, the Doctor, I am afraid,

will now carry heavily about with him the weight of good fourscore years, whilst Cecil has already a miniature copy of himself as old as I was when we left England."

"I dare say they will detect quite as great an alteration in you," rejoined his companion, smiling: "Miss Rivers I am afraid will disown you now, sir."

The young man blushed, and spurred on his horse, as if he was growing impatient of the turn the conversation was taking.

"Why need I care whether Miss Rivers owns me or not?" said he, rather proudly, the next moment.

"Not at all,—you are nothing to each other," continued his companion, drily, "you will not know each other probably when you meet, and, for her part, I dare say she has long since forgotten you"

His auditor attempted to stifle the pang these few words caused him to suffer. Through all the long years that had elapsed, since last his foot had touched English ground, her image had been ever

constant in his mind, influencing every action, and colouring every thought. Yes, twelve years had elapsed since Herbert Clarendon had become a wanderer in foreign lands, exiled from all he held dear and precious, by a delicacy of constitution which had for the greater part of that time threatened to induce consumption ; and in all that time he had worn the medallion portrait Sophy had given him, at parting, round his neck, whilst a still more lasting and more vivid image of the beautiful original lay enshrined in his heart.

“ Let us ride on more rapidly,” said he at last, in an altered tone, “ I should wish to see Delaval if possible on my return, before the daylight has quite faded away.”

His companion needed no second adjuration, and both clapping spurs to their horses, rode on at a brisk rate for three or four miles further, until a pair of old but handsome lodge-gates were passed, and they were fairly within a fine park, well covered with timber of a good old age.

“ How pleasantly the hawthorn smells!” said

the younger traveller, looking round him with a happy smile, "it almost makes me a boy again, to snatch a whiff of its delicious perfume; my father had a great love for that usually uncared-for shrub, and had clumps of it planted every here and there in his park."

"He had quite the eye of a painter, if we may judge by the effect of the part we now see!" said Mr. Butler, looking round him with an air of unfeigned admiration.

"Most of it was planted in my grandfather's time," said Herbert, with the very natural pride of ownership; "are not those old trees quite superb?"

"Magnificent indeed! the park seems very large."

"Almost too large; and if I carry out those schemes for the employment of my poorer neighbours which we have so often discussed, I am afraid I shall have to curtail it. I am as proud as any one of such a splendid appendage to my residence, but wealth has higher and loftier duties

than the indulgence of such paltry pride as that."

"And yet, what a sin it would be to lay the axe to all that fine timber!" argued his companion, looking at him with his keen eye as if he expected to see the young man's face give the lie to his words. "It would be downright sacrilege, Herbert."

"I'm afraid I run a great risk of committing it then," retorted Herbert, rather sternly. "If I see no other plan to work out my wishes, down they shall come, and in their stead I will erect a score or two of comfortable cottages, such as any human being would not scorn to live in."

The half sardonic frown on his companion's face melted into a more generous smile, as the young man delivered himself of these sentiments with a noble enthusiasm that added a deeper glow to his handsome and intelligent countenance. His answer was simple, and yet it told the young man that his resolution had met with approval. "We have discussed this point too

often, Herbert, to permit me to continue the argument here."

"We have not time, even if that were necessary, sir," said Herbert, gaily. "See! there is the front façade of the hall, and if my eyes do not deceive me, a group of people watching us from the terrace.

The young man drew up for a moment, and permitted his eye to drink in with delighted eagerness the scene that lay before him. The sun had not yet fully set, and its dying splendour still lingered about the old mullions and casements of the hall, which, with its terraces, and gardens, and fountains, lay like a beautiful picture before them: the effect was heightened still further by the dark masses of wood that girdled it on every side, giving it exactly the appearance of a beautiful picture set in its dark green frame of verdure.

They were sufficiently near to distinguish the groups that occupied the lower terrace, and in a moment Herbert's eager eye had singled out a troop of children, gathered about a

white-headed man, who sate in a large garden chair, propped up with pillows; a lady stood beside them, affectionately smoothing the cushions and hushing the noisy prattle of the merry brood, and Herbert's fast beating heart told him that in this matronly figure he had recognised his sister Eleanor.

But where was Cecil?

He had, until now, looked for him in vain. There was another group that reminded one of a picture of Watteau, so gay and courtly were the four or five ladies and gentlemen that composed it. They were reclining on the mossy bank in a circle, listening to an air which one of them was singing to the accompaniment of a harp, and in the performer, Herbert recognised Camilla.

Now, however, two figures were seen emerging from a dim arcade that opened upon the terrace, and long before they had reached the last solitary figure of the party, that stood as still and lonely as a statue buried in its own thoughts, under a magnificent sycamore, Herbert had recognised

Cecil and Mrs. Dalton. They joined Mr. Dalton, and then the young man started, and apologised for detaining his companion so long.

"Let us join them at once," said he, trying to shake off the nervous tremor he felt coming over him. "I—I do not see Miss Rivers."

"Perhaps she is ill," said his companion, teasingly.

Herbert spurred on his horse, as if such a supposition were death to him, and a minute after he too was bending over the chair of the aged, yet still lively Doctor Rivers.

"My more than father!" he cried incoherently, kneeling down as he spoke, "behold me returned to you once more."

"I really believe this is our poor Herbert returned to us," said the old man, turning to Eleanor, who had grown red and white twenty times in the last minute: "Eleanor, love, your eyes are younger than mine, perhaps you can detect something of the old familiar lines in that glowing face."

Herbert had her already in his arms, and had kissed her twenty times at the least. The music party had now joined them, and Cecil and his companions were hastening as well towards them. Herbert's late companion was somehow for a moment forgotten, in the wild delight of reunion, and having nothing to do, was examining the architecture of the hall, which was both curious and picturesque.

At this moment a bright vision made him forget the gabled turrets and mullioned windows before him; for a young girl, in all the dazzling beauty of budding womanhood, appeared on the hall steps, and came gliding timidly towards them. I say gliding, for no other word can so accurately express the gracefulness of her motions; and in fact, her white dress, and the delicate bloom of her complexion, almost made the unpoetical tutor imagine he saw a spirit coming towards him.

She passed him with a half-timid curtsy, and Butler then saw her steal up to the group that

surrounded the venerable patriarch, for such Dr. Rivers might justly be called.

His keen eye at that moment fixed itself upon Herbert. The young man saw her in a moment, and the rich carnation dyed his brown cheek, and flushed his pale brow as he started forward and took her hand.

The young girl coloured too, all over her clear truthful face and marble throat, and the tutor in a moment read the tale of love that he had thus so rapidly had displayed before his eyes.

“Is she much altered?” he asked in a whisper, in his mocking tones, when Herbert for a moment came up to him to see that he was not neglected amidst all the hubbub.

“Very much, I think,” said Herbert smiling.

“But she is not good-looking,” persisted Butler, ironically; “look at the lines of her face, her complexion, her figure. You would not call that beauty in any one else.”

“She is divine!” retorted the lover, pinching his ear familiarly. “See they are going into the

house ; go up to her and examine her mind as keenly as you have done her person."

The tutor sauntered towards the group that surrounded the good old Doctor's chair. She was not amongst them, but the next moment the flutter of her white dress pointed her out to him in the shady alley, where they had discovered Cecil and Mrs. Dalton on their arrival. He was so lonely, so unregarded amongst them all just at this moment, that it needed not Herbert's adjuration to induce him to follow her. Miss Rivers did not see him approach, and he had leisure sufficient to study her countenance before she discovered that she was observed.

He felt that she was very beautiful, for he had a soul that revered beauty in every shape ; and Sophia's loveliness had in that unsophisticated neighbourhood already become proverbial. She was sitting with her straw bonnet in her hand, and a few bright tresses had become disarranged by the wind, and had partially fallen over her forehead ; a clumsy movement of the tutor's,

made her start and look round, and then she beheld him advancing towards her.

“Excuse my intrusion, my dear young lady,” said he, with his grave smile. “Herbert is so much engaged with his friends, that I wandered away, and have found my way thither, though only to disturb your privacy.”

He saw her blush and smile, and was moving away when her words detained him.

“I too, sir, felt in some sort an intruder on the universal joy on Mr. Herbert Clarendon’s return home, and on that account must so far sympathise with you, as to beg that you will not run away on my account; you are punctual to the time Mr. Clarendon named.”

“We are : it is one of Herbert’s virtues.”

“Has he so few that you particularise them in that manner?” said she, rather mischievously.

“She has some intellect,” thought the tutor, looking at her with his half closed eyes ; “how I should like to study her mind!” Then he said

aloud, "Very far from it, my dear young lady. Herbert is very largely endowed in that respect."

"I should not have known him," she said, the next moment, on perceiving that he did not continue the conversation; "the ten or eleven years that have elapsed since we last saw him have done wonders."

"Do you think him grown much handsomer?" asked the tutor, drily.

"That is scarcely a fair question, as I did not see him under favourable circumstances during our former intimacy," continued Miss Rivers, quietly; "you forget that he had then just recovered from a very dangerous illness, and was besides just of an age when few boys are good-looking."

"He was thought good-looking on the Continent," continued the tutor.

"It is growing very dark," said Sophy, "so that I can scarcely distinguish the person coming down this walk. Is it Mr. Cecil Dalton?"

“I think not,” said the tutor, moving slowly away. “Good evening, Miss Rivers.”

The new comer paused to speak a few words to him, and then came on rapidly towards her; something within her whispered to the beautiful girl that it was her old boy-sweetheart, and the next moment Herbert had clasped her to his heart.

“I have never forgotten you, Sophy! I have always thought of you as the only being that I could ever ask to be my wife! My dreams have been haunted by the chubby little elf that used to be my playfellow,” cried the impetuous young man, straining her again and again to his heart, and snatching kiss after kiss between every word. “Look up, wife mine! and let me hear you say the blessed words, ‘I love you!’ ”

She lifted up her face for a moment, with those radiant eyes bathed in tears, and attempted to falter out the words. Herbert kissed her forehead, her lips, her hands, and half crying himself with emotion, drew her away slowly towards the

house, pausing at almost every step to commit some extravagance which, however ridiculous it may appear on paper, was very natural certainly to one of his impetuous and ardent temperament.

They had a very quiet wedding, although it was not until the end of the summer that they were united. It was Miss Rivers' wish that it should be so, the infirm state of her excellent protector making any great gaiety inconvenient at that period; so the beautiful old church which contained the remains of so many of the Clarendons witnessed the union of Herbert and Sophy, with their modest bridal train, and the happy pair immediately set off on their wedding tour.

Autumn was still in all its golden glories when they returned. For a week before extraordinary preparations had been made to do honour to the occasion: and, as their landau swept through the park, one of the most beautiful sights in the world welcomed the return of Herbert and his bride to their home. A gaily decorated tent of huge dimensions stood on the lawn immediately in

front of the house, profusely adorned with flags and streamers, and around this groups of happy beings swarmed as thick as bees, many of them joining in a gigantic country dance, which tripped merrily away to the music of a capital band, raised amongst the Clarendon tenantry. As the carriage drove past, a deafening cheer was raised on every side, which Herbert forced his wife to rise to acknowledge, whilst he cheered, and hurraed, and shouted as loudly as the best of them.

“Drive on, my lads, for your lives,” he cried, on seeing that they were attempting to take the horses from the carriage: “don’t make yourselves slaves even for me or my wife. Drive on! drive on for your lives!” and in a moment the uproarious crowd were left far behind; and then, calling to the postilions to stop, he opened the carriage door and jumped out.

“Will you go back with me, or drive on to the hall?” he asked of his wife, holding the carriage door in his hand.

“With you, if you wish it, my love,” said Mrs.

Clarendon, who never liked to lose sight of him for an instant; "they won't be very rough, I hope."

"Oh no! we shall only stay for a moment to drink their health, and then slip away," said Herbert, drawing her arm within his own. "You can drive on with the carriage to the hall," he said to the men, and the next moment they were surrounded by the crowd.

Sophy was very timid for the first minute or so; but she soon recovered herself, and smiled right and left just as gaily as her husband. The crowd were very respectful after all, considering how merry they were, and, after listening to a short speech from Herbert, and having their healths drunk both by their young landlord and his beautiful young bride, one of them made a speech in return, and, amidst the deafening cheers that followed the proposal of their healths, Herbert drew his fair young wife away, and left them to the enjoyment of their bounty.

Of all the actors who have figured in this story the good old Doctor is almost the only one who has paid the great debt of nature. He died in the arms of his adopted daughter ; and so calm and serene was his departure that it may rather be said that he ceased to exist than that he died. His end was calm and tranquil, as that of every true and humble Christian should be, and his last word was one of love for those whom he had so long cherished and protected. He lies buried in Delaval churchyard, at the foot of a venerable elm, and a plain marble tablet in the church serves as a record at once of his own good deeds, and of the filial love and reverence of his adopted children. Old Father Joe is also dead.

Natty and Meg have long been comfortably settled at Delaval, Natty holding a post of trust on the estates. Both are in fact treated by their master and mistress more in the light of humble friends than as servants ; and on Nan's marriage to the farm bailiff Herbert himself gave the

rosy bride away, and presided at the wedding dinner. A few of the old servants had shown a little jealousy of his partiality for the sturdy smith; but since Herbert took that occasion of explaining the deep obligation he lay under to Natty and Meg, they have become part and parcel of the lions of the place. Herbert has also settled a handsome pension on Jabez and Sall, which has made them quite independent of the fishing; whilst the poor landlady at the way-side public-house has been installed as housekeeper at the good old Doctor's cottage, where Herbert and his family reside during the autumn—Weasel and Mrs. Dorothy having retired some years ago, to enjoy the fruits of their industry in a married state.

Four strapping lads and one fair girl sit round Herbert's table, and in the latter he beholds once more the Sophy Rivers of his boyhood. The Daltons spend much of their time at Delaval, as Herbert is naturally anxious to have the benefit of his late guardian's advice in the improvements

he is making in his estates. Sir Norman and Lady Macdonald are at present at Nice ; but they will be at home in the spring, when Sir Norman intends resigning his ambassadorial functions, as both yearn for the privacy of their Scottish straths and hills. Lady Macdonald is considered the most beautiful Englishwoman at present on the Continent ; but this may in some part be owing to the princely magnificence of their living. However, they are a very happy couple, and sincerely attached to each other.

And nobly has Herbert fulfilled the promise of his youth, in his more matured manhood. In all merry England there is not a happier tenantry or more prosperous estates than those over which the will of Providence has called upon him to preside. On all sides you behold smiling fields and comfortable homesteads ; and, amidst all the repining and complaining now so unhappily rife throughout the land, you rarely hear a retainer of his utter a desponding word. He has done his duty nobly and proudly, and looks to the fruition

of his work and the ease of an approving conscience for his reward. He has a fondly attached wife and a promising family—health, wealth, and fame—and what can we possess more on this side of the grave?

THE END.

